

The Monk Chronicles

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Thank you for making the effort to find and read this. The fact that you've made it to this point indicates that you are a near and dear friend to us. We apologize for having the annual letter only on the web site, but it made sense for a number of reasons. Several of them are obvious; some are not so apparent. Anyhow, the fact that you're here means a lot to us. Please feel free to print this newsletter out if you wish.

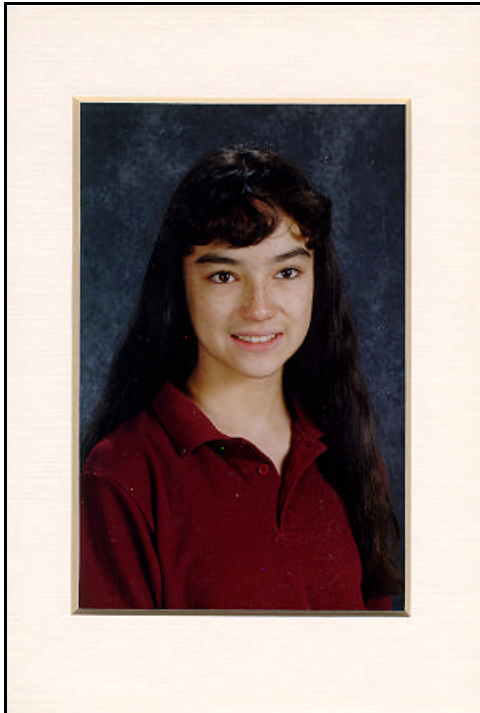
Writing these letters is always difficult for me. I have trouble remembering what I did last week, let alone last spring! (You know what they say: when you have to make a list to remember more than two things, you're ready for your PhD? Well, I already have my PhD!) I'm trying to think what we've done this year that is noteworthy. We had a family "vacation" to Dallas in January and two trips to Utah during the summer. Ann went to Korea in April for her brother's marriage. In addition, Ann and I went to Chicago and I went to San Francisco, both in June. I had conferences to attend in both cities, so off we went.

As a continuing part of our lives, music and musical activities dictate much of our day-to-day schedule. Between getting the kids to lessons and having them practice, you'd think that we'd be sick-to-death of music. We're not. The kids aren't either. The other day, I said something to Suzie about quitting some of the music-related activities that keep her so busy. She responded without hesitation, "No!" Needless to say, the kids don't particularly enjoy practicing. What they do enjoy, I think, is the feeling of fulfillment that comes by having mastered a new piece of music.

We officially formed the Monk String Quartet this fall with Andy as first violin, Michelle as second violin, Suzie as viola, and Ricky as cello. They have already had two short performances and have two more scheduled. They got a quartet coach to help them out and they've made some real progress. It's fun to see the difference between them playing *as a quartet* and just having the four of them play together.



The Monk String Quartet, October, 2001.



Suzie. September, 2001,
12 years old.

Suzie graduated from elementary school last spring and is now in Jr. High School. Deciding which school to attend was a huge decision for her (and us). We finally decided on a school that seems to match her interests and abilities. She is taking pre-AP classes for English, math, science, and social studies. She's also in gymnastics (a chance for her to learn something entirely new), art, and orchestra.

Suzie officially quit playing the violin in the spring, having decided to concentrate her efforts on the viola. She's doing very well. In fact, she's in the 7th grade, but was asked to join the 9th grade orchestra. She also tried out and was accepted into the all-region orchestra. It's a real honor to be selected for that group. They tried out on a Saturday; results were posted on Tuesday and they got their music on Wednesday or Thursday. The orchestra practiced together as a group on Friday and Saturday and gave a concert Saturday night. The concert was excellent.

Suzie is still taking piano lessons. I say she plays piano better than viola, but it's probably because she's been at it for so much longer. She started piano when she turned four, but has only been playing a string instrument for a couple of years now.

As always, Suzie is at the top of her class. She reads continuously. Did you ever see a kid who reads at the breakfast table? Well, Suzie does!

Something has happened to Andy this year. I'm not sure what caused it, but he has become the most detail-oriented student you've ever seen. He spends hours on his homework, just to make sure everything is exactly right. He likes to do his reports for school on the computer and they always look impeccable. My worry is that he spends so long on his homework that he doesn't have time for anything else. The up-side is that his grades are exceptional.



Andy. September, 2001,
11 years old.

Andy joined the 6th grade orchestra at school this year. Since he had so much experience with the violin, he decided to play the string bass in the school orchestra. He's only brought it home a couple of times (thank goodness). It seems he doesn't have to practice at home because he's picked it up so quickly. I don't think he'll stick with the bass, however. He's still taking violin lessons and will play that in the Jr. High orchestra next year. Andy takes piano lessons also, and plays well, albeit very differently from Suzie. He's loud and strong where Suzie is fast and delicate.

Andy is in 11-year old scouts and loves it. They had their first overnight camp-out a couple of weeks ago. It had just rained so everything was good and muddy. He liked it anyway and said he can't wait to go again.

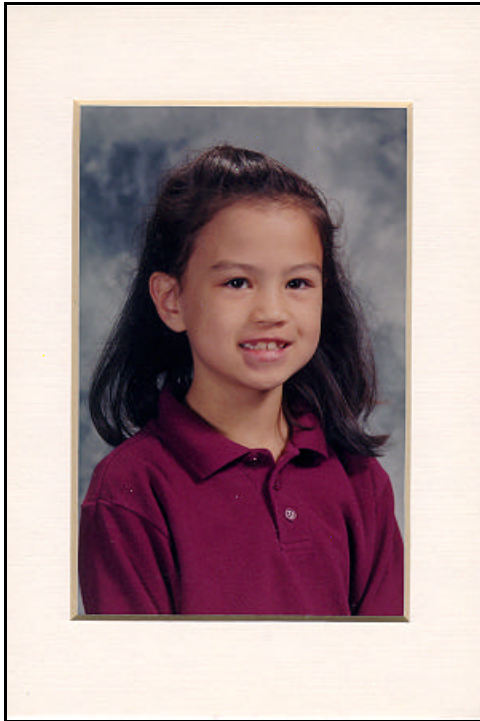
Ricky is in 4th grade this year. He's doing very well on all of his work and gets excellent grades. Unfortunately, he seems to have some trouble remembering to turn in his homework. Andy had the same trouble a couple of years ago, so I'm thinking maybe it's a boy thing. I hope he outgrows it soon, though— it's very frustrating.

Ricky is still in Cub Scouts. He has earned the rank of Wolf and has nearly completed the requirements for his Bear. He is growing up to be a real gentleman. He takes good of himself and others. A talent that he has and is developing is his ability to talk to people and to make them feel comfortable. He really likes people.

Ricky, Andy and Suzie are all members of the Lubbock Youth Symphony's Philharmonic Orchestra this year. The Philharmonic Orchestra is a combination of the old Strings Orchestra (for beginning students) and Concert Orchestra (for intermediate students). The idea was that the intermediate students could help the beginners. This is Ricky's first year in the orchestra and he has made very good progress this fall; in fact, he is first chair in the strings group. I wasn't sure how Andy and Suzie would like the Philharmonic Orchestra, but they seem to be pleased with it well enough. All three of them went to the fall retreat at Ceta Canyon just south of Amarillo; they loved it.



Ricky. September, 2001,
9 years old.



Michelle. September, 2001,
7 years old.

Michelle is, perhaps, the best student we have. It wasn't obvious before, but now that she's in 2nd grade and has more challenging work, it has become apparent that she's really "got something going." On her last report card, she had 98, 99 or 100 in every subject! She likes to read, but isn't obsessed with it.

Michelle is still playing violin. She plays second violin in the Monk String Quartet. Sometimes she gets upset that she can't have the melody line so Andy lets her play it (on certain pieces). Michelle and Ricky just started on their piano lessons again. We had to postpone their lessons for a couple of months this fall because of our schedules, but they're back at it again.

As I said before, Ann went to Korea in April for her brother's wedding. She was gone for about three weeks and had a wonderful time. The last time she went to Korea was in 1998, so it was time for another visit.

As I said before, we went to Utah twice this summer. The first time, we left as soon as the kids got out of school in May. Ann and I only stayed for a few days, but the kids stayed there when we came home. The boys stayed with Uncle Vince and Aunt Sylvie while the girls stayed with Grandma and Grandpa Monk. It was while they were in Utah that Ann and I went to Chicago and I went to San Francisco. At the end of June, we went back to Utah to bring the kids home. They were there for six weeks in all. They must have had a great time because they talk about it all the time. They say they can't wait until we go there for another visit.

We do hope that this holiday season finds "you and yours" happy and healthy. I wish we could see you more often, but it seems that's not possible so we extend our warmest wishes for *a Merry Christmas and Prosperous New Year.*

Best Wishes to All,
Richard, Ann, Suzie, Andy,
Ricky and Michelle



Our family on vacation in Utah, June, 2001.



First day of school, 20 August, 2001.



Ann at the Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, June 2001.