

January 7, 1988

Dear Wulffraats!

The line of ants, marching four abreast up from the floor, looked like Elizabeth's first magic marker graffiti on the newly-painted kitchen wall, a random swing of a line with squiggles and detours around unidentifiable landmarks. As Karen (I am sure) has told you, the ants arrived in November, just as the Holiday Season began. It was they, I am sure, that slowly picked away at Christmas and carried it off on their million little backs so that suddenly, in January, Christmas was all gone, leaving but a shadow as a reminder of its once whole self. Like the M&M that fell under ant attack and went from colorful sugar coating to soft chocolate to finally just a brown hazy mark with no substance, a memory on the shelf paper in the corner of the cupboard. Today, however, the ants are gone, too. While not yet Easter, they have nevertheless risen by the thousands to ant heaven, helped on this very day (January 7th - mark your calendars) by a powerful insecticide and a shop vac that picks up 16d nails on a good day.

But the shadows of this Christmas past contain the memories of good things: A Brooks shirt of such quality that I am afraid to wear it to work for fear of spilling coffee or a honey-dipped raspberry jelly donut (plop!) while negotiating freeway traffic one-handed. So I figure I will wear my yellow slicker on days when I wish to look my best. Real cotton, too!

And a box of cheeses and sausages that we managed to eat in front of the fire before the ants got to it. And a knife (a serious kitchen tool) which is virgin sharp and is always, now, the first chosen for any task except killing ants. When it gets dull and tired of cutting, we will probably get another new one - simple people like us just don't have the nack for sharpening tools, even with automatic motorized abrasive wheels and gadgets above the kitchen counter, we can never get them factory sharp. You should see Karen cutting up tomatoes!

Lisa, the blue sweater is already worn out, I'm afraid, so you may have to send another right away! Its been sooooo cold here that there were ice-covered puddles in front of the Lucky Market in Montclair and we have had to run the furnace every day. So when we actually found Money! in the shadows of Christmas past (actually, Karen hides those kinds of presents in the branches of the Tree, not in dark shadows where they may get lost, and perhaps to pretend that it grows there), it was like rain on parched desert sand. Now it's all gone, too!

On the day after New Years, when we painted the Lionel pink to match Elizabeth's room, we used that neat window painting gel on the important electrical contacts under the cars so we could easily peel the paint off. What a great present! Especially on the engine, it worked super, although we should have squirted some of the gel into the smoke funnel because the latex paint got all hard in there.. Maybe if we heat up the engine with the propane torch the clogged paint will come out. Elizabeth loves her train!

Christmas was great, and you guys were part of it, even from far away. Thanks for the presents. I hope you get moved in at the new house before you have to share what you have with others. It's just not a big enough bathroom on Third Street, and getting both you and the new people around the kitchen table would be a real feat! Have a happy new year!

Best Love,