



Christmas 2003

# Wilbanks Family Newsletter

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## Special events in our family's life

- Lots of vacations
- Rob changed jobs
- Caren took on the school district
- Morgan excelled in school
- Ethan worked hard in therapy



## Happy Holidays from our family to yours!

God is good. Our family has had a challenging but good year and we're looking forward to an even better next year.

What a difference a year makes. A year ago Caren and I were mourning the diagnosis of Ethan's autism and dreading the daunting work ahead. We were struggling with our budget and my job was relatively stressful. A year later we feel more encouraged about Ethan's future, our budget is improved after refinancing our mortgage and I've changed to a less stressful and more fun job. We have also been blessed to be able to take a number of rejuvenating

vacations and getaways.

Life is getting easier and simpler. I'm starting to appreciate and enjoy the less spectacular things in life that seemed so trivial to me in younger years. The combination of becoming more mature and having a child that might not be able to appreciate the small things has taught me to appreciate the time I have and the children God is allowing us to raise.

## Vacations Restore and Rejuvenate Us

I love having annual vacations where I know I can catch up with family and friends. We're so lucky to be able to mooch vacation lodging off my parents. Our annual spring vacation in Escondido was relaxing as usual. We played a couple rounds of golf, lounged and ate well. There was a small grass hill next to our room where the kids often played. One day Ethan joined the others and ran up and down the hill, laughing and falling. He would run up, turn around, look at me and run down with a big smile. Parallel play and

looking directly at my eyes were subtle improvements. He seems to make small breakthroughs on vacations. I don't know if it's because he gets more time with us or if it's getting a change from his strenuous routine. But then I/they don't know much about the causes and resolutions of Autism in general. Regardless, Ethan seemed to make some progress on that vacation and the rest of the family got a needed break from the daily therapy routine.



Deanna, Ethan, Morgan and Paige at Welk Resort in Escondido, CA



Morgan on a ski boat at Shaver Lake

## Caren's Birthday Getaway

Caren and Lisa have started a tradition of escaping to a spa for their birthday with Joanie. For the big 30<sup>th</sup> they drove to Napa for massages, movies and outlet shopping. Caren told Morgan about the

trip and Morgan thought it was hilarious that grandma Joanie took a bath in mud. Caren only wishes she could have taken a hidden camera.



## Three Camping Trips

We went camping three times this year, a new record for us. Each summer we tag along with the Wibbers and others from their church when they camp for a few days at Moonshine campground north of Grass Valley. The campground is on a river and the kids have a blast. Everyone brings inner tubes to float down the gentle river, the kids catch frogs and the parents sit around and eat. Ethan spent hours gathering small rocks and throwing them into the water. He loves to watch things move and thus loves rivers. Morgan impressed aunt Lisa by riding down a rapid on Caren's lap. Morgan loved every minute of it!

On a second camping trip Morgan and I drove to Edison campground on Shaver Lake east of Fresno to meet my mom and dad. Dad has become quite a camper now that he owns enough campers, trailer and camping equipment for 6 families. I didn't see much of Morgan as she spent her time playing with Paige. They explored the trailers and nearby lake and giggled a lot. She even got a ride on a ski boat with uncle Norman.

I had fun watching dad compete with Dave Fox and others in cooking techniques. Cooking and the methods used are very important to that group. For a while I thought a fight would break out on how long to let hash browns fry and how small the potatoes should be diced. But the best part of

camping is the silence- the lack of white noise from traffic and refrigerators. At least until dad turns on a Giants game on his satellite fed rv tv! J

For my birthday weekend Caren and I escaped to a campground near Santa Cruz. Mom drove up to watch the kids at our house. At the campground we slept most of the time and sat quietly by a nice fire.

I love my kids but it's great to occasionally get a break. We've had children for almost 5 years now so, as you know, we forget how simple logistics are without them. Caren and I were driving home on Sunday morning and passed a small breakfast place on a windy forest road near Big Basin.

For a second I thought, 'it would be nice to stop in there' and before I finished the thought it hit me that we can stop in! It's just Caren and me! So I braked hard and pulled into the parking lot. We were in the restaurant in less than 60 seconds- unheard of with the two half-pints. We took our time, sipped hot chocolate and talked, an almost forgotten pastime. Though I can't assign the kids much blame for my lack of conversation skills. Anyway, those were some of the best pancakes I've had in a long time.

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Morgan and Ethan on a train at pumpkin patch

