



The year 2002 was filled with many changes, some of which were as welcome as a root canal. Take the unwanted verification that ferrets only live 7 years: Rocky—our dark brown ferret—wobbled off to heaven in February; Chunky—our \$1,200 model of sainthood—followed in July. By January, Sox will have joined them, leaving Big Wuzzy to tackle us and eat bananas all by himself into 2003.

Yet, we still don't have enough ferret fur for even one pair of slippers.

To fill in for the disappearing ferrets, Mark—who took a one-year leave of absence from the State for a teaching job at Alma College—brought home a few furry surprises. One day my kitchen counter was cluttered with bread and chips and ordinary kitchen items; the next day, it contained an aquarium with a fuzzy tan thing called a dwarf hamster. Measuring only 2 inches long, Hampy was to have been food for a snake at Alma College. Mark claims to have saved Hampy "for Holly," which doesn't quite make sense because Holly doesn't live with us...and Hampy.

But that's okay, because "Arthur needed a mouse, and, besides, they were going to feed the mouse to the snakes, too." So there appeared in my kitchen a second aquarium, which contained a very friendly white mouse with a gray head which Arthur named Aldacar. A few weeks later, I came home to find what looked like a skinny Hampy running on Aldacar's exercise wheel. But it wasn't Hampy, it was Arentar, a pal for Aldacar which Mark said he got, "Because you needed a mouse, too." Silly me. I was so out of touch with myself that I didn't even know I needed a mouse. I did need to know something else, however.



"Are the mice the same sex?"

"I dunno."

"So you brought home two mice without knowing . . . ?"

Two weeks later, friend and former pet store worker, Brenda, informed me that, "If a mouse's holes are close together, it's a male; if they're farther apart, it's a female."

Never having had a mouse I asked, "Exactly what constitutes 'close' and 'far apart'?"

To which she frowned and said, "If the mice's holes are a similar distance apart, they're the same sex and you won't have mouse babies."

Two weeks later, I finally built up the nerve to lift both mice by the tail to check said holes. Thankfully, they are both close together. Which makes them gay, from what I can tell.

Other good news this year includes the fact that Mark's part-time position at Alma was announced as a full-time permanent position. He has a 1 in 15 chance of getting the full-time permanent position, and has as one contender a derelict from Georgia who responded to the job announcement by saying he wanted to be cloned.

Other good changes that occurred this year include: 1) the fact that Willi—former Portland Weirdo hanging out with vegetarians and belly dancers—is now back in town and working with "troubled youths" in Livingston County. Ignore here, the fact that Willi and her brother and sister are living in Livingston County. 2) Becky graduated from MSU in December with a degree in mechanical engineering and got a job offer without even having to turn in a resume. 3) Arthur's migraine-free head has been taken over by extraterrestrial forces inspired by Lord of the Rings, vampires and many other forces few people understand. 4) Holly, soon to be 13, is mastering important skills like how to play basketball, throw a football and, my favorite, "spoil Amy."

This summer, Mark, Arthur, Holly, and I returned to Montana to climb the 11,000-plus-foot north face of a mountain called Mt. Wilse. Never heard of it? Well, it's one of those rare mountains that's easier on the knees to climb up than down. In light of this recent discovery,



from hence forth, I shall only be climbing up mountains.

Having turned 40 in December, I feel compelled to share a few other observations, philosophies and questions, the first two of which are actually Mark's:

- Getting older is a matter of finding out what's going to break next.
- If you have a chance to get your photograph taken, do it, because you're only going to look worse tomorrow.
- If we can make self-cleaning ovens, why not self-cleaning bathrooms?
- Fuzzy creatures lower your blood pressure. Get too many of them and you'll stop breathing all together.
- My dogs follow me into the bathroom; I'm glad my husband does not.
- If your husband says, "You'll probably get cold while you're fishing so I'm betting you'll be home around 2:00," he will call your mother by 5:30 and plan to call the police by 6:00. Luckily, I returned at 5:40. And boy, was I in trouble.
- If your mother's response to your husband's worrisome call is, "Let's wait until 6:00 before we call the police," she never really loved you and has been faking it all these years.
- If you like your job with the State of Michigan, you will get reorganized. And have to move. And report to a manager who was expecting somebody else.
- If the reorganization screws things up completely, the next administration will reorganize you again. And you'll likely move again.
- If you don't live right, your husband will leave State government right before the reorg.
- A really stupid Department Director will invite all of his staff to a Christmas party, then tell staff that they have to bring everything.
- Every politician has a family tree that should have been cut down a long time ago.
- Most family trees don't get the water and fertilizer they need.
- Cards and gifts made by children are worth their weight in gold . . . and more so when the price of gold falls.
- If you start losing your sense of curiosity, either hang out with kids or Ph.D.s because neither kids or Ph.D.s stop being curious . . . about everything.
- Ph.D.s can make good data out of really bad data and have a fun time doing so.
- Consultants can make good data out of really bad data and charge you an arm and a leg.
- Arms and legs cost more more than they used to. But so does everything else . . . except family, friends and fuzzy creatures.



Enjoy your family, friends and fuzzies this holiday season. Best wishes for a happy new year.