From: The Whole Borenstein Family
To: All Our Friends
Subject: It’s the Borenstein family message!

Hello! This is the Borenstein family annual letter. Yes, we used to call it a "holiday letter" like our more conventional friends and acquaintences, but as most of you know it has been many years since we allowed ourselves to be so tied down by the tyranny of the calendar. (OK, so the truth is we’re very slow to get our act together. But really, don’t you already get way too many letters at Christmas time anyway?)

This year, we got off to a good start; the parts of the letters that the girls wrote were actually written in early December, as will probably be fairly obvious. Trina and I were the big procrastinators. (Actually there’s a sense in which I spent the whole year, and even more, working on this letter, but I’ll mention that in another section.)

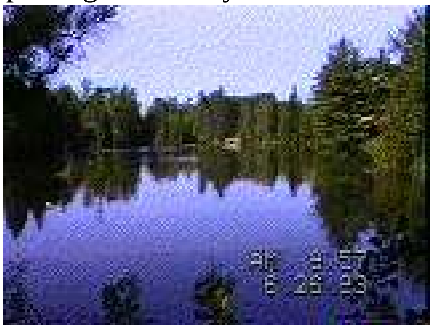
This year’s annual letter is also a bit of a technological experiment, too. We’re making it available in several different formats, for four different categories of technological capabilities. (We’re equal-opportunity friends, and we’ll cheerfully correspond with those unfortunate enough to be computing-impaired, but the high-tech version is the most fun.) Specifically, although we really only wrote one annual letter, we produced and distributed it to be read in four different ways. You are currently reading the paper version, which means that you don’t, as far we know, have ANY access to electronic mail. That’s a real shame. (If I’m wrong, PLEASE tell me by sending mail to nsb@bellcore.com.) You’ll see all of the textual parts of this letter, but you’ll have to settle for a grainy black-and-white rendition of all the color pictures, and you’re missing out on the audio parts completely. (Actually, you’re seeing most of them in transcribed form.)

Anyway, what follows is our one annual attempt to keep in touch with all our friends and family to whom we should be writing more frequently and individually, but never do. Please know that we love to hear from you, even though we aren’t always courteous enough to make the time to reply individually. We hope you all had a wonderful year, and that 1994 is, for all of us, a year of peace, prosperity, growth, and happiness.

And now, on with the show!

Once again last year we were privileged to spend nearly our whole summer at our place in Michigan. You've no doubt heard about all the rains in the American midwest last summer. In Michigan, things never reached flood stage, but our little pond (Guppy Lake) was higher than we've ever seen it -- so high, in fact, that it covered both ends of the bridge Nathaniel built a few years ago to connect the area with the log cabin more directly to the rest of the property. (Pictures are attached.)

In the middle of the summer, we took a vacation from the arduous work of living in civilized Greenbush. We visited my parents in Rock Island, visited Trina's brother Daniel in Madison, and toured the Wisconsin Dells. (In both Rock Island and Wisconsin, we saw some of the incredible mess left behind in the flood's wake. It's very sobering to see a piece of downtown Davenport that is, for all intents and purposes, fifty feet on the wrong side of the shoreline of a river!) But the most exciting part by far was our backpacking trip. All five of us went off into the deep woods of the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore, in Michigan's Upper Penninsula, where we hiked (up to ten miles in a day, with full packs -- a real milestone for the girls!) and camped for several nights in splendid isolation, with no other human beings around us for miles. Our girls are now all certified outdoorswomen, just call on them if you need to have any serious exploring done for you!

Hi, this is Miriam! School is fine over here. I'm taking piano lessons with Pam Moyer. She's a really nice person. How are you doing?
This is Miiram and I want to wish you a Happy Hanukah or a Merry Christmas.
Bye!


Hi everybody, it's Rachel! I just hope that all of you are OK. I'm OK. I take piano lessons, violin lessons, and karate lessons. I think I'm pretty close to becoming a yellow belt in karate. I'm doing very well in school. I'm in the top reading & math classes. I miss every one of you, whoever gets this letter! Bye!


Hi everybody! This is Shana and I've been taking karate lessons and I'm much better than Rachel and Miriam who I take karate lessons with. (Rachel's voice: That's not nice!) I don't take piano. I take cello lessons and I played two concerts recently and just today I sang in the school chorus I'm doing OK in school but not great, and I'm going to a party tomorrow, and I play the recorder. Bye!


From Trina:
Many of you may have noticed the preponderance of blue moons, brought on by the freezing over of Hell. Yes, I have taken the GED and enrolled in our local county college. I've chosen Graphic Design as my major, and started classes on a part-time basis (9 credits) in January. (Luckily, the semester ends just about the time I'm hoping to jet off to Europe for a couple of weeks in May.) It is my plan, at this point, to take two years worth of courses at the county college, then switch to a regular four-year institution to finish up. I'm hoping to get a dual degree in Art and Geology. Luckily, one of the few undergraduate programs (in Geology) in New Jersey is at a college three miles from our house. I've also taken a part-time job as an administrative assistant for the Association for Computational Linguistics. It's similar in some ways to the job I enjoyed so much in Pittsburgh (for the Journal of Polymer Chemistry), but the tasks are more varied and the need for my abilities much greater.

So, my life is, as always, in a state of flux. The decision to go to school has pretty much put my cookbook on a high, dusty shelf. If I don't find working part time and attending school part time challenging enough, I may pull it out again.

I've cut back somewhat on the volunteer work that I do for the school, and intend to use my terribly demanding schedule as an excuse for doing much less next year. (Now the REAL reason for my life changes becomes apparent!)


From Nathaniel:
My life in 1994 was more of the same, basically. Actually, I suppose I could say that my whole year at work, and indeed most of my last decade at work, was spent on this letter you're reading now! That's because this year's annual letter, available as multimedia interactive email, represents something of a culmination of a decade's research and development. I also wrote the usual articles, gave a bunch of talks, and finished up a lot of loose ends and peripheral work related to my research over the last decade. By the end of the year, work was actually taking a back burner for the first time in a long while, as I reassessed my life and career and looked for a new focus to replace multimedia mail, a productive obsession that has now mostly served its purpose in keeping me off the streets. In recent months, I've been doing a lot of reading, thinking, meditating, and particularly singing and playing guitar. It's been a refreshing period, but lately I've found myself very naturally focusing on new directions for my work and career, about which you'll be hearing more later.

!!!! LATE-BREAKING NEWS !!!! LATE-BREAKING NEWS !!!!

Well, I’m finally able to tell you (this is why our annual letter has been delayed so long this year) that I am leaving Bellcore, having accepted a position as Chief Scientist for First Virtual Holdings, Incorporated. This is a big move for me, a major change of direction and focus in my career, and it promises to be extremely exciting and challenging.

If you’ve never heard of First Virtual, that’s no surprise -- it is a brand new company -- but I’m hoping this won’t be the last time you hear of us. All I can tell you for now is that we’re going to be doing some very exciting and innovative things, NONE of which have much in common with my career up to now. However, I’m not leaving anything in the lurch -- I’ve pretty much tied up all my loose ends at Bellcore, and First Virtual has encouraged me to continue to participate in all my ongoing professional committments (standardization efforts, conferences, journals, and the like). In addition, I will continue to work on getting my multimedia magazine, the Electric Eclectic, off the ground.

I don’t know my new email address yet. I hope that my Bellcore email will forward to me for some time, but if you lose touch with me you should always be able to reach me by sending mail to "nsb@dbc.mtview.ca.us" or, in a real pinch, by calling me on the telephone. (The telephone, for those of you who have forgotten, was a commonly used communications technology in the days before electronic mail. They’re still easy to find in most large cities.)

Well, that’s the end of our annual letter! In addition to all the things we normally say when signing off, such as that we’d love to see you, talk to you, or read mail from you whenever possible, this year I’d like to add one final note, which is to apologize for any "bugs" or "glitches" you might have encountered in this year’s annual letter. I guess that’s the price you pay for having a state-of-the-art friendship!

With love & best wishes for the coming year,

Nathaniel, Trina, Shana, Rachel, and Miriam