

815 Hollins St.; Balt., MD 21201

January 4, 1993

(Uncle Alan and Aunt Alma)
Dear Family,

This year, Aunt Doris and Uncle Gary had 14 "young people" (that's including both of them) around their Christmas dinner table -- evidence of our steadily expanding Gordon family.

Computer whizzes Joy and her boyfriend Kevin popped over from Virginia. Missionaries Matty and Simone are in the U.S. for several weeks of furlough and dropped by. Norman and Elsie flew in from California, where they're working hard on graduate degrees at Fuller. Donald, the engineer in the family, and (yes!) his girlfriend Marianne, born in Hong Kong, also made the transcontinental flight and, for dinner, brought along two guests, Rosanne and Allen. And then, of course -- surprise, surprise -- Carol and Tim were there. Back from Ecuador, she's trying to land a job again at the National Arboretum; I've got another year and a half at Univ. of Md. Law School.

For fun, we counted the languages we spoke fluently (guess who!): 14 ENG., 5 PORTUGUESE, 3 CANTONESE, 2 SPANISH, 2 MANDARIN, 1 FRENCH, 1 THAI, 1 TAGALOG/CEBUANO, ½ HEBREW, AND ½ JAPANESE. Then we counted what we could at least say "I'm hungry" in (guess!): 14 ENGLISH, 8 PORT., 6 SPANISH, 5 FRENCH, 4 MANDARIN, 3 CANTONESE, 3 TAGALOG/CEBUANO, 2 JAPANESE, 1 THAI, 1 RUSSIAN, 1 HEBREW, 1 TOISHAN, 1 KOREAN, AND 1 CREOLE.

What about where we had "lived" (at least 10 months) (guess!)?: 14 U.S.; 7 BRAZIL; 3 HONG KONG; 2 PHILIPPINES; 1 FRANCE; 1 SPAIN; 1 ISRAEL; 1 THAILAND; AND 1 PANAMA. And where had we visited (at least two of us): 14 U.S.; 12 FRANCE; 9 BRAZIL; 8 CANADA; 8 U.K.; 7 PARAGUAY; 7 EUROPE (BESIDES U.K., FRANCE); 6 HONG KONG; 6 MEXICO; 5 PANAMA; 5 CARIBBEAN; 4 CHINA; 4 JAPAN; 4 ECUADOR; 3 BOLIVIA; 3 THAILAND; 2 KOREA; 2 PHILIPPINES; AND 2 VENEZUELA.

If anyone figures out this whole puzzle, Joy -- or maybe Donald? -- promises to send you an invitation to the Gordon family's next wedding.... (Broad hints: While in the military, Kevin lived in Panama and the Philippines; Simone lived in France; Norman, in Spain and Thailand; Tim, in Israel; Elsie, in the Philippines; Marianne, Rosanne and Allen, in Hong Kong; Donald dabbles in Asian tongues and went to Alan's wedding with his parents; and Carol visited Haiti and Ecuador.)

Incidentally, let me tell you a little about the events leading up to that sumptuous dinner...

*'Twas the week before Christmas, when all through the house,
Every creature was stirring -- even Norm and his spouse.
The guests were arriving at the airport each day
In hopes we'd go get them and whisk them away.
One day to D.C. cousins went with a bound
To give Elsie Gordon her first look around.
The Congress, the Lincoln, Air & Space we all saw,
Vietnam, National Art -- we all had a ball!
Then the day before Christmas, Norman proposed
We go hiking at Cacapon and get all cold-nosed.
Like down-to-earth reindeer, we crept through the snow
With compass to find the ol' "Bald Spot" -- and lo,
What on that mountain should suddenly appear
But a great slab of rock with a view miles clear.
While visions of fireplaces danced in our heads,
We trudged down the trail, longing warmly for beds.
But when we arrived at the lodge, Norm suggested
We spend a full quarter on a game to get rested.
Our eyes--how they twinkled, our cold cheeks how merry,
As there we played Pac-Man, asking others to tarry.
For memories we treasured of those days far behind,
Back before we knew of the bills and the grind.*

*Then back towards the Grove did we fly in a flurry,
For Carol had presents to wrap in a hurry,
And then there'd be Christmas, open house at Joy's,
Norm's annual caroling: "Rejoice! Rejoice!"
And then, Sunday eve, Norm and Elsie would host
The GPC installment of their Wedding Year toast....
...And so that was all right, do you see, Best Beloved?
Our hope is that next year you~~may~~ be a part of it...*

Well, in other news of a more prosaic variety, let me tell you about my visit to Philadelphia to see Dubside (formerly "Peter Gordon"). He just finished an apparently very profitable whirlwind month of holiday party sound jobs and was in good spirits. We went out to an Indian restaurant for lunch -- "all-you-can-eat" for \$4. I stopped after three rounds of rice and curry and chunks of fruit, but it took a fourth plate before my vegetarian cousin felt ready to "call it a meal." Good stuff.

Dubside wants to move soon. He now lives in a low-rent, first-floor room, which serves primarily as a place to store his bicycle and large, state-of-the-art sound equipment. Above it all he's built a loft, where he sleeps. The room is fine, he explained, but his current housemates upstairs are "derelict, fringe" types, "not the crowd I like to hang out with." What he'd really like is to get out of the "urban scene," he said. He's had enough of constant worrying about crime, etc.

Still committed to no-compromise '60s idealism, Dubside wants nothing to do with the American establishment he finds so reprehensible. Echoing the words of David Thoreau, he refuses to finance a government that would spend his hard-earned money to make the wealthy wealthier, to produce and sell arms of mass destruction to developing countries, and to further other gross injustices. However, since he always gets paid in cash and never uses his social security number (he's even avoided getting a driver's license so as not to give the government his address), he will probably -- unlike the Walden Pond idealist -- not even have to spend any time in jail for his convictions. (I didn't tell him one of my law school courses this next semester is Income Tax.)

Like many of his generation, Dubside is disappointed with The System's countless imperfections -- so disappointed, in fact, that he believes the only solution is to "start over": to uproot the rotten plant, plow up the hardened soil, and re-seed the garden. In a way, he's right. "Starting over" is perhaps the only hope of a final, absolute "solution." The problem, though, is that "solutions" are a myth. Perfection is a mental fiction -- something philosophers like Plato pondered in the Academies while their wife and slaves mended their clothes and cooked their food back home. Ultimately, it's a lie. There *is* no "perfect" rose, no "perfect" sunset, not even a "perfect" spouse, I've been told.... The stuff of life is knobby, bumpy, uneven. Anything we create in this wonderful Real World, deny it or not, has rough edges. Every garden we plant will have weeds.

I like Thoreau. But, as every law student is compelled to realize, life is no Walden Pond -- much less a Garden of Eden. Crime and public utilities are facts of societal living. That's where laws, governments and taxes must come in. That's when communists realize they need *glasnost* and *perestroika*. That's why capitalism and democracy, though "messy," are *good* things. *C'est la vie! Viva!*

What's more, I would argue that that is partly why Bill Clinton won the White House. He's good at "messy." People like Jerry Brown and Ross Perot scorned him for being a "Slick Willy" politician, but what did they offer instead? Brown had his easy 13 percent "flat tax" and Perot hinted at a simple, benevolent dictatorship. No thanks. The democracy game may need improving, but I want a President who plays it. This is the '90s, and we're "into" messy.

Dubside and I agree George Bush was a lousy "gardener." I only wish he'd accept that the only way to help depose an incumbent U.S. President is to register and vote for the "least imperfect" candidate who has a chance of winning. Reformist realism, not revolutionary fiction. Progress through compromise. Pull up the weeds, but, please, save our rough-edged rose gardens.

Well, enough about my enjoyable (well, at least *I* enjoyed it) politico-philosophical conversation with Dubside. I hope your knobby, bumpy, uneven 1993 goes well. Please write.

*With none of your girls in the country, I hope you two
aren't getting too lonely. Our thoughts are with you. Love,
Tim*