



# The Tolopka Dattler

More-or-Less-Christmas 1998 Edition  
"All the News It Gives Us Fits to Print"



## The Front Page (International News)

Stockholm, Sweden – The Swedish Academy announced today that Nobel Prizes in Physics and Economics have been jointly awarded to Janet and Stephen Tolopka of Portland, Oregon for the couple's pioneering work on "Where are the missing socks?" The proof that heated, spinning, electrically-charged matter (such as that in a clothes dryer) can be spontaneously translated to a previously unsuspected dimension of space-time<sup>1</sup> prompted the Physics prize. The unprecedented dual award of the Economics prize followed the startling discovery that the process can be inverted to produce near zero-cost clothing in dryers that license the billionaire couple's patented technology.

## Sports

As Dickens once said of baseball,<sup>2</sup> "It was the Best of Times, it was the Worst of Times." Worst Times<sup>3</sup> first: Our *Who's on First?* softball team finished only 5-6-1 this year, managing to lose one game in which 15 of our first 16 batters reached base safely. Despite a second-half-of-the-season rally, we just missed the playoffs.

But what can we say about The Best Baseball Season of All Time except "Wow!!!" For weeks, we both were glued to whatever channels had live coverage of the *Mark and Sammy Show* and were lucky enough to see all the historic homers as they happened. Steve spent all fall with a goofy grin on his face<sup>4</sup> and recaptured the

forgotten joy of really following a team and living or dying with the daily box scores.

Not content with experiencing the entire season vicariously, in June we made a long-weekend trip to LA for our first-ever visit to one of the cathedrals of the sport. We flew down Friday afternoon, hopped in our rental, drove straight to the Dodger Stadium, and arrived just in time to grab a couple of Dodger Dogs and settle in for the first pitch. The next night we had box seats a peanut's throw from the right field foul pole and cheered Ismael

Valdes's perfect game through seven innings (he finished with a one-hitter). Steve's partially forgiven his parents for living practically in Brooklyn but never taking him to Ebbets Field before it was torn down down.<sup>5</sup>



Volleyball continues as ever, although neither of us is playing on an official team this year. And in late-breaking news as the year ended, Janet outdueled two archnemeses and forty other wannabes to win the annual Football Pool that's been around since Purdue days.<sup>6</sup> Her prizes: Free pizza, her name engraved on the traveling trophy, and all the glory she can eat for a year.

## Weather

Weather or not you can stand it, there's more!

<sup>1</sup> Dubbed the "Hozone" by the Tolopkas.

<sup>2</sup> Either in his book *Great Expectations* (chronicling the experiences of a long-suffering Chicago Cubs fan) or possibly *David Leftfield* – can't remember which one for sure.

<sup>3</sup> Well, maybe not exactly Worst Times, but certainly Mediocre Times.

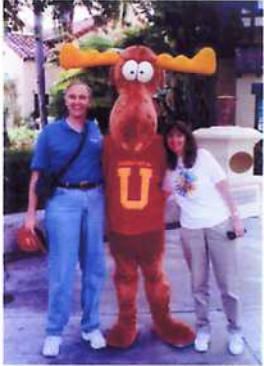
<sup>4</sup> Yeah, I know that's nothing new.

<sup>5</sup> Sure, their excuse is that I was only 4 years old, but that kind of seminal experience would stick with a person, don't you think?

<sup>6</sup> See [ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/tolopka/fbp.htm](http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/tolopka/fbp.htm) for FBP history and all the gory details.

## Travel

We were lucky enough to take two great outside-the-U.S. trips this year. In January we spent a week cruising the islands of the Lesser Antilles (Grenada, Dominica, St. Lucia, St. Kitts & Nevis) with Steve's parents. The water and the people were warm, the snorkeling was spiffy,<sup>7</sup> and we generally had a fine time. On the way home, we stopped to see Steve's brother Ken and family in Orlando. Highlights: Meeting a



childhood hero during a day at Universal Studios theme park, scaring the hell out of waterfowl and 'gators during an airboat joyride on the St. John's River, gawking at manatees hovering like mammalian zeppelins in the waters of Blue Spring State Park.

Just before Christmas, we formed up with all the parents and two friends from Portland to

invade Panama and Costa Rica. Hey, wait a sec – one parent, two parents – one little puppy (Janet's Mom) isn't here! Where *is* that Poky Little Puppy?<sup>8</sup> The answer: "surviving a 10-hour departure delay in Jacksonville – but finally arriving in the dead of night" (whew!).

The first Star of the Trip was the Panama Canal, a perplexing combination of the stupefyingly amazing and the totally mundane:<sup>9</sup>

- One view: By several orders of magnitude the world's largest project at the time of its completion. 50 miles of waterway connecting two oceans. A 500'-wide, 200-300' deep swath whacked out of an eight-mile section of the Continental Divide. 1000'-long concrete locks with 80'-high steel gates made to float because they're hollow. Engineering so well done that its major elements are unchanged 80 years later.
- Alternate view: A big honkin' ditch full of water. Enormous bathtubs that fill or drain to raise or lower ~~du~~ekies ships.

<sup>7</sup> Highlighted by a dozen bright red six-inch squids that Steve promptly dubbed a "squidron."

<sup>8</sup> Our taste in fine literature is very broad.

<sup>9</sup> As one of the crew told me, "Going through the Panama Canal is something everyone should get to experience once ... but not have to do twice."

The other Star was The Rain Forest. We visited a Choco Indian village in the Darien Jungle of Panama, hiked through two biological reserves along the Costa Rican coast, and rode an aerial tram through primary rain forest canopy about an hour's drive outside San Jose. The rain forest is truly an amazing place – more shades of green than you'll ever have in your Crayola box, where it seems that every plant, however huge or small, has some other plant trying to grow on it. Oh yeah – it's also clear that "thorns" is high on the hit parade of Tactics for Successful Evolution.



Of course, there's wildlife galore. Despite hearing many more birds than we saw,<sup>10</sup> we spotted trogons,<sup>11</sup> parrots, toucans, kiskadees, and all sorts of red-capped or -rumped things. There were big lizards, tiny crabs, several coatimundis, capuchin and howler monkeys, heliconia and morpho butterflies that flashed like rubies and sapphires before vanishing, a tiny-but-deadly eyelash viper, and nightmare-sized ants.<sup>12</sup> All in all, a *most* satisfactory trip!<sup>13</sup>



## The Lively Arts

In April, we made our first-ever road trip with 300-odd<sup>14</sup> members of the One More Time Around Again Marching Band to San Antonio for the Fiesta Flambeau Parade.<sup>15</sup> While in town we played a short concert right next door to the

<sup>10</sup> It's equally clear that "hiding in trees" is high on the TfSE list for fauna.

<sup>11</sup> Despite the name, these are not alien birds from Star Trek but a family of gorgeously-colored birds that includes the quetzal as its most famous member.

<sup>12</sup> "Strong bite that makes you cry like a baby, followed by stinger injection of formic acid that causes high fever for 8 hours and makes parts of your body swell up like a balloon."

<sup>13</sup> For more photos, including some new parental tattoos, see <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/tolopka>.

<sup>14</sup> And trust me, odd doesn't even begin to cover it!

<sup>15</sup> See <http://www.omtaamb.org/pictures.html> for more photos.

Alamo, ate fabulous Mexican food at a restaurant recommended by one of the Clipper Cruise staff in January, and savored ice cream as we strolled along the River Walk on a soft Texas night. The trip home posed the riddle “What do you get when you put 130



hyperactive band people on a Southwest Airlines flight that holds only 134 people?” The answer turns out to be “Toilet paper races organized by the flight attendants.”

“Geez, get a life!” we hear you snort.<sup>16</sup> We took that advice by

joining the Get A Life Marching Band<sup>17</sup> as a way to extend our Marching Musical Pleasure. We’ve been thrilled by fine events like:

- The Hillsboro Fourth of July parade, where we marched behind the John Deere tractors and Pizza Schmizza truck;
- The Miss Oregon parade in Seaside, which consisted primarily of pretty girls waving from atop the back seats of convertibles;
- Christmas parades in Portland (where we dodged the rain) and Salem (where we didn’t);
- A benefit for Life Flight, a Portland State University football game, a high school reunion – the mad whirl just never ends!



## Real Estate

This summer, Janet’s Mom moved out of Miami to a new home in Middleburg, FL (near Jacksonville). As Miami’s parting gift she received the attentions of Classic Movers, who lost a box of her clothes, damaged her furniture, refused delivery when she tried to pay with a credit card, charged her an extra \$600 redelivery fee for coming back the next day, and denied all. The result: The quest to bring these scam artists to justice is Janet Quixote’s new passion.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> And not for the first time!

<sup>17</sup> This year’s motto: “We’d rather miss a note than a meal.”

<sup>18</sup> Prospective Sancho Panza’s hurry—she’s getting tired!

Closer to home ... The lovely five-acre farm that abutted our back yard and of which we have written so glowingly in the past is kaput. The cows? Gone. The fifty-foot poplars? Gone. The long view to the creek? Gone. In its place we have a budding subdivision, eleven lots that we’re sure will be filled with houses quicker than you can say Urban Growth Boundary. We’re now just “an existing corner lot.” Yuk.

## Obituaries

Sadly, we can’t omit this section. Janet lost three uncles this year, two on her Mom’s side and one on her Dad’s. All will be missed. We still fondly remember picking up Ed Segda from the airport for our wedding and schlepping him around two states while collecting wedding cake and champagne. *Ave atque vale.*

## Business

Despite what you might think from the above, we are still gainfully employed. The spanking-new Westside Light Rail system lets us both take the train to work a couple of days each week. Janet’s winding up her fourth year as an accountant with our Metro regional government. Steve is still leading the technical side of Intel’s Wired for Management industry initiative, making the management of business PCs cheaper and easier; he and his team received an Intel Achievement Award for this work last spring. Steve’s convinced they mostly keep him around because of things like the Door Sealing Ceremony that he orchestrated in March, with pseudo-Latin chanting, dire pronunciations of anathema, didgeridoo, and bagpipes.



## The Back Page

The Tattler only has finite space, so we won’t bore you with the details of visit’s from Steve’s aunt and cousins on their way to Alaska, or Ken’s 3-day visit during which we learned about the “manly poses” of loggers in old photos. Have a blessed and healthy 1999; laugh loudly & often.

With love,  
Steve & Janet