

OK, OK, I know, this letter is turning into a tale of “Nakira 07”. There’s not much time for anything else, so indulge us a little. I guess you’re gathering that we like our little daughter just a wee bit. Let’s move on to the small bit of news about the other sentient (sometimes not so sentient) household fixtures, otherwise known as Mindal, Rod, Zeus and Freyja (the latter two our cats, if you haven’t already been bored by my telling you about them). Zeus and Freyja still get much pleasure from hating one another and are coping pretty well with Nakira crashing into their lives. Freyja keeps out of Nakira’s way, but Zeus, the territorial moggy who claims indigenous title to the couch, our bed and our love, and Nakira have developed a relationship decidedly fraught with sibling rivalry. Nakira is equally territorial about her kiddy couch (with “Happy Feet” penguins on it), so things get a bit out of hand sometimes and the paws, claws and fists clash – when you have to wrench the two of them asunder before it all ends in tears for both warriors!

I turned 43 this year and Mindal 39 a week afterwards. Now I’m a prime number again. For me the number four is burnt yellow and three emerald green, nine is blue and thirteen (one of the two prime factors of 39) is white and emerald green. So it was a pretty coloured year for Mindal and me. Next year will be a bit boring – ages 44 and 40 respectively, no primes, yellow and white, the prime factors (2, 5 and 11) are blue red and white. Little Johnny Howard would have been proud of his patriotic little subject. A shame he’s no longer in office to appreciate it (yeah, right, like I’m REALLY sad the little *!#!*!#!*!#! has been cacked on by the collective big bottom of the Australian public).

Mindal took on a new job in August – she was enjoying her work at her former firm, but she was working for a company managed by twenty five year olds who were true legends in their own lunchboxes and in sore need of a grown up to come along and tell them that no, they were not the biggest entities in this galaxy, nor this star cluster, nor this solar system, nor this Earth, nor land nor even this little suburb for that matter – and, oh, by the way, whilst you’re fugal in your delusional little dreams of godhood, you might like to take a look at the lunchbox’s, I mean your company’s, bankbalance and heed that your precious little universe is going bellyup faster than Steve Irwin riding a stingray. So Mindal, full well realising that man, or woman, cannot live on psychosis alone, decided it was time to get off – a couple of stops before The Iceberg – and go look for a job that could give her a paycheck in return for her efforts into the foreseeable future. Mindal is liking her new job – a small company that seems much better managed and professionally run – and moreover just about everyone there is about our age and has small children about Nakira’s age – so they seem understanding of Mindal’s need to work part time. Neither Mindal nor I are doing any singing – although I kept up with the Southeastern Philharmonia choir until May this year. We sing “Playschool” and “The Wiggles” as well as the few little songs we make up for Nakira these days. Mindal’s dad seems to be taking a great deal more interest in his granddaughter this year, after seeming a bit bemusedly aloof and unsure of how to approach the new creature. Maybe it’s that he’s gotten to know her better – maybe it’s got to do with Lois’s passing. If you haven’t heard, Mindal’s mum Lois died on Christmas eve last year. We buried her with a moving ceremony written in part by Mindal, Jane and Richard (Mindal’s siblings) and Lois’s (and Mindal’s) former singing teacher Carol Veldhoven singing the Mozart song “Abendempfindung an Laura”, accompanied by our friend Roger King from our choir on the piano (thanx again, Roger & Carol – muchly appreciated).

I myself am still working for Optiscan and still working three days a week (to look after Nakira two days) and still enjoying myself there. This year we took delivery of some near infrared lenses of my own design and they worked well. At least, Optiscan are still willing to have me! And I had fun designing them, which is all that really matters ☺. We have some more lenses of our own designs being built in Hessen in Germany – there is an “Optics Valley” there. These days it is customary, in the true Dilbert way, to name anything you want to make sound innovative, high tech, in-the-loop, on-the-money and all the beweaselled rest of it a “Valley” – in allusion to “Silicon Valley”. Kind of like “Centre of Excellence”, “World Class”, “Cutting Edge”, “where’s that dictionary so I can shove a few more impressive sounding but scarcely understood syllables into an utterly meaningless phrase” blah blah blah ... Hence, there is an “Optics Valley” in Tucson Arizona – even though it’s the middle of a desert, flat as a tack aside from the odd Saguaro (you know, those cactusses that were in “Roadrunner and Coyote” and look like zombie silhouettes), so “Valley” is a bit of a stretch. One might, in a really, really liberal interpretation possibly helped along by psychotropic substances invoke some far-off “mountains” (the Catalinas, which are about half the height of Mt Dandenong, maybe less) to help the beweaselled high-tech marketing metaphor along. Thus, my cynical self was somewhat humbled to find, on going to “Biebertal”, that there was indeed a dinkum, for real truly ruly valley there, replete with castles and roaring rivers in the hollows (I should have paid more attention to the name “Biebertal”, *i.e.* “Bieber-dale”). I’m still doing a bit of theoretical research in the scare time I have, not as productive as last year (three papers published with my friend François) but I scratch the odd equation onto the odd bit of paper here and there and then Nakira comes and scribbles on top with her pens – Mindal and I joke that she might discover the correct dark matter terms. For the nerds amongst you and who don’t yawn at

the thought of such things, I am working on coupling the Dirac electron field to a fluorophore and the matter in an optical fibre at both at once and expressing the equations in a way that might be particularly relevant to what I do for a day job. Believe it or not, such basic problems don't seem to ever have been tackled. When I heard that one of our friends' sons is just beginning a physics degree, hopefully to launch a career in theoretical physics, I was heartily envious. I would love to go back and take this road as I earnestly believe the next twenty years will be hot hot hot for theoretical physics, especially as the next generation of particle colliders will come online next year and I am sure that we little humans, who like to think ourselves so far above our sister and brother animals that share our Earth, are going to find holes in the so-called Standard Model that many physicists are so smug about. Maybe we'll even see results that can test some of the more exotic theories floating around. Okay, like you care, or even ought to care when there are so many fun things to do in the world!

Cross country skiing is one of them, and this year I got to complete, for the first time in five years, the Australian Birkebeiner. Last year I had been wiped out during the race by a gigantic Norwegian skiing for the Norse team, the two years before that I didn't go to the snow and the year before that I got sick on the day of the race. We all went off to Falls Creek for a week in August – Nakira thought the snow looked like a giant cappuccino froth; we know that because she kept making the coffee machine noise when she saw it, the same sound she would make at the local coffee shop whenever we watched the coffee machine (steam, sound and loud hisses are SOOOO exciting) waiting for coffees for us and babycino for her. Mindal and I spent most of the week pottering around on short trips with Nakira town in a pulk - a little sleigh made for babies to ride in. Since it was I who did the towing, I found a 21km ski race really easy when compared to two kilometres around the ski village! Nakira loved riding in it – she had never really seen a snowy landscape before and she was supersnuggly warm in a little fleece snowsuit.

Mindal and I are striking some new trees in our garden – a couple of gums and I have been trying to strike seeds from a native cypress, called a Callitris, that grows in the semidry open woodlands of the Riverina where I spent much of my childhood. So far without success, but it's exciting to put the seeds into the potting mix, peek every few hours and hope they might sprout! We've drilled holed watering hoses under the roots of our trees and empty Nakira's bath into these – so our trees are thriving notwithstanding the drought. We're also making up designs for a build-on to our house, which we hope to put to the local shire council early in the New Year, so we'll no doubt make water recycling much more systematic when we do that and will be able to think about other garden projects.

Have a grand Christmas everyone and we'll catch up with you soon.
Love from

Rod
forborne by Mindal
Nakira
Zeus and Freyja December 2007



Nakira in her own "Big Red Car"

We wondered for some time why the computer would mysteriously switch itself on



Bathtime is a fave.



.... as are balloons.



The couch is mine – till that little rascal gets back.



Nakira decides to try pappa's shoes on ... and actually walks quite steadily in them!



Funny hat day aka Melbourne Cup



Sometimes even Nakira sleeps, letting us catch up too.



Maybe if I put my swimming gear on they'll take me



You're the grandest little bairn that ever was!