



A Series of Unfortunate Events

DISCLAIMER: The views expressed in this Christmas newsletter do not necessarily reflect those of the Grajek family. It was inspired by the wry, dark humor of one of their favorite authors, Lemony Snicket.

Before you read this, consider yourself warned. The following newsletter chronicles a year in the life of a beleaguered Grajek family caught in an economic quagmire of their geographic region—the Detroit area. If you are prone to get sad, cynical, or totally despondent on hearing the sad fate of these good people, **DO NOT READ THIS NEWSLETTER.** It would be better to read something more edifying like Christmas cards.



Let's move on. It may be premature to say that the auto industry in the Grajek's hometown is in its death throes, but to say it is in a "sales slump" no longer captures their predicament. Similarly, the term "economic downturn" doesn't seem to apply to their situation. "Disaster," "implosion," and "free

fall" sound more reasonable. Throw in the worst global economic recession "since the Great Depression," the Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick scandals and a contentious presidential campaign, you have the ideal backdrop for the motif of this newsletter—*A Series of Unfortunate Events*.

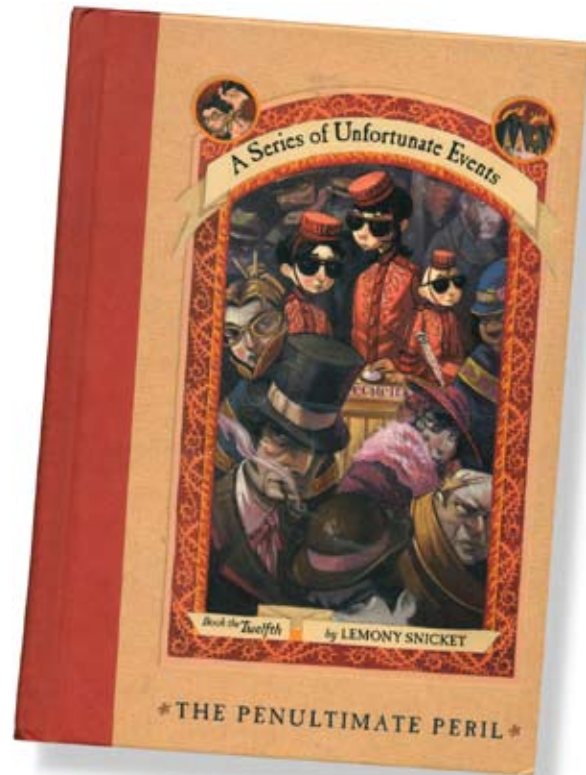
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The Year of our Lord

Two Thousand and Eight

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A Series of Unfortunate Events is a 13-part series of children's books (note the number 13), by Lemony Snicket, the Grajeks are reading aloud as a family. According to the author, they are "gothic novels about children growing up through terrible things." The books follow the trials and travails of the Baudelaire orphans who had lost their parents in a fire. The three children, Klaus, Violet, and Sunny, are constantly on the run. Their evil relative, Count Olaf (Pronounced O-loff) is out to get them, so he can inherit their vast fortune. Whenever the three children find a new guardian to adopt them, Olaf shows up with a new disguise and scheme to catch them. Besides narrow escapes from the clutches of Olaf, the Baudelaire children's ordeals include: being stuck in a sinking boat on a lake full of man-eating Lachrymose Leeches, descending pitch-black elevator shafts, and being forced to memorize ridiculous stories and hear horrible violin concerts.



2008: Year of Transition



Dan Grajek, high school teacher?

Yup, Lemony Snicket's *Unfortunate Events*, is the perfect theme for this Christmas newsletter, but instead of the evil Count Olaf, the Grajeks were once again pursued by the sinister Count *Layoff*. Last December, Dan was downsized from his position at Transmission Technologies Corporation (second layoff in two years!). He spent the next five months

driving all over town looking for a job, in a time when gasoline prices were in the stratosphere. (Gas rationing got so bad that that the Grajek children had to get some exercise by walking to school.) Dan did manage to find an opportunity in May with DotSign, an Internet design, marketing, and branding company. However, things got slow and, DotSign, while a promising new startup company, couldn't meet Dan's short-term salary requirements. After much researching and soul-searching, Dan arrived at an epiphany: why not pursue the career he had long dreamed about—teaching? In October, Dan tested the waters, doing substitute teaching for Dearborn Public Schools along with Lori, and asking for feedback from family members and seasoned educators. Dan's positive experiences and responses confirmed that the career move would make sense. Besides, Dan simply loves teaching kids. Now he is enrolled in the pre-MAT program (Masters of Arts in Education) at the U of M - Dearborn (majoring in Special Ed and English). He has two long, grueling years ahead of him studying to be a high school (or middle school) teacher.



Justin's Initiation Ordeal

Speaking of grueling, last July, Justin (now 15-years old) officially began his knight training on a backpacking trip on the Alligator Trail near Sleeping Bear Dunes. (The Grajeks had started a new order of knights called the Confraternity of the Knights of Virtue.) This strenuous physical endurance test was the first of a series of initiation rites he must perform before he reaches manhood. Rumor has it that these rituals will include hunting antelopes, bloodletting and walking over hot coals in his bare feet.



Justin Grajek: on his way to knighthood.

More Awful News

I know it's hard to understand, but the Grajeks remain happy and content in the face of their dire circumstances. Like the Baudelaire siblings, each family member has a distinctive skill that helps them. 17-year old Andy is always inventing new board games, Justin is always creating new surreal landscapes ("ages") on the computer and, Ben (9-years old) wrestles with Daddy and plays computer games. Lori attends decorative painting class-



Andy Grajek, writer and board game maker.

es and visits friends such as Debbie and Linda in Royal Oak. Dan engages with teenagers as a small group leader for the Catholic youth group, BRICK, and people of different faiths on Beliefnet. Lately, he's been enjoying studying the world's religions.

The Grajeks waste their precious time on activities like writing. Dan and Andy (along with family friend Joe Cheff) collaborated on their book "As World-views Collide: A Teen Survival Guide to Postmodern Culture." They claim it will help teens (and adults) "fully understand the popular set of ideas that destroy your ability to think logically." We think otherwise. Except for a rave review by best-selling author Patrick Madrid (*Surprised by Truth, Pope Fiction*), the entire enterprise has been a complete flop.

Other worthless writing projects: Justin has been reworking a story he started in 5th grade... Andy is writing down Frankfort (our summer "home") memories. Both Andy and Justin also critique books by their friends, the Armstrong boys. (Paul Armstrong is on his fifth book, Michael is on his second)...Dan writes and delivers speeches for the Toastmasters Club...Lori writes emails to her friends...Ben writes excellent reports for school.

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This year, Dan had turned a personal liability into a personal triumph in a relatively quick time. For most of his life, stage fright hampered his ability to speak in front of groups. Well, since Dan joined a local Toastmasters group, Dan delivered three well-received speeches. One of them was a 45-minute talk about his spiritual journey before a large group of teenagers! Also, Dan also encouraged Lori to join him in exercising more by taking strenuous walks around the neighborhood. We're sure they will soon fail in these well-meaning attempts to improve themselves. It's human nature.

Insignificant Events You May Want to Skip Over

- Andy**
- Completed Level 1 driver's education
 - Received an award for high academic achievement
 - Received a violin for his birthday — made by his great-great grandfather
- Justin**
- Received the Sacrament of Confirmation in April with Andy as his sponsor
 - Went to I.D. Tech Camp to learn how to make video games
 - Attended marching band camp (where he marched even in his sleep)



Lori Grajek with brother, Marty Wunderlich



Benjamin Grajek, a friend of all.

- Ben**
- Went to Michigan Adventures amusement park in Muskegon with his dad and the Roach family
 - Joined school choir and art club
 - Is being trained as an altar server at Sacred Heart Church

Yes, folks, things in Michigan look pretty bleak right now, but the Grajeks agree with Winston Churchill during WW2's darkest days: "This is our finest hour!" They are facing life's obstacles by living out principles and keeping the faith. They see their terrible circumstances as a plus, an opportunity to grow spiritually (and, in Dan's case, professionally). The Grajek family hopes you, too, will experience joy and profound spiritual growth amidst these difficult times.

Well, that's our unbiased account of the Grajeks. Here is their message to you:

**"Merry Christmas and
Happy New Year!"**

*Love, Dan, Lori, Andy,
Justin, and Ben Grajek*