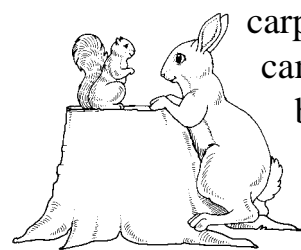




Our first mortgage payment on our new home was due on January 1st. Our first major natural disaster in our new home was January 17th (you can see where this is going). The earthquake. Darlene and I were actually very moved by this experience (it had its ups and downs). In addition to our adventure so near the epicenter, we lost water and power for 36 hours, a fence, plumbing, all of our crystal, Lladro, most of the previous day's wedding shower gifts (we unpacked them just before going to bed), and the location of our upcoming March 6th wedding. After making new plans and changing our wedding invitations *twice*, we got married in the original location, after it opened just the night before. After exchanging rings (first the suffer-ring, then the wedding ring) in a very romantic ceremony, we had a very romantic honeymoon, which included our favorite stomping ground (grape stomping that is)—the Napa Valley. The first week back I got an absessed tooth and had it removed after two weeks of extreme pain. A few weeks later we suffered the violent and premature loss of Darlene's very close cousin. Good news: we decided to eliminate our indoor swimming pool (a.k.a. *the garage*) by replacing our driveway with one that works. Bad news: after parking my Supra on the street on the day the concrete was poured, I discovered my car (and my new, non-replaceable "YSMT SM" plates) missing—never to be found. Hence the *new* Supra, the *new* "SEMT SM" plates, and the *new* \$3600/year insurance payments (*turbocharging* must refer to accelerating insurance premiums). Postscript: that driveway also flooded the garage and was replaced—*twice*! The house (a.k.a. the Money Pit) continues to control every spare moment of my life, as I'm the resident



carpenter, plumber, electrician, painter, and gardener. Our wild bunny (which came with the house) has started following me around and now likes to be petted, but the squirrels were displaced when we trimmed our enormous tree. Have I learned to like living in this hot/cold, smoggy, geographic jumble of non-planned communities and bad drivers called *the Valley*, even though there is little culture, entertainment, or other stimulation? Not really. My twenty year high school reunion has showed me that even us old farts can still look pretty good. I still have my job with the Department of Airports, although I haven't had the full frontal lobotomy that is required of most civil service employees. I have a renewed interest in my photography (I'm trying to create a new image for myself) and I hope to make some good images during our annual winter trip to Yosemite. Meanwhile, Darlene is studying for her January 7th, state licensing exam for psychotherapy (with a name like "Manick" she has to be good) and my parents are doing relatively well (was that a pun?), as my dad is adjusting to his kidney maladies and my mom is still adjusting to my dad. It's been an eventful year, and in spite of a few hurdles, we've been pretty lucky—with much support from good friends and family (you know who you are). Darlene and I wish you all the best in the new year.

