

Dear Friends,

December 2004

Let's see... my last letter was sent off just before the holiday madness began. In mid December, Bridget and I hosted a holiday fun fest to celebrate the [Return of the King](#) premiere with some of our friends. The fun started with a trip to the [Blackfriars Theatre](#) to see *A Christmas Carol*, and continued early the next morning with a *Lord of the Rings* marathon (two movies at home, one in the theater) and a party afterward. We were totally mental to do it right before Christmas but we did have fun.

We continued our tradition of having a costumed Christmas party for our girlfriends around Twelfth Night. The theme was "[A Jane Austen Tea](#)" so we set an elegant table, served a high tea and requested that our guests attend in early nineteenth century costumes. The evening was tons of fun and was the highlight of my holiday season. I somehow managed to finish three costumes for the occasion, which was a great feeling.

The last minute crunch of those costumes, all the parties, the usual holiday madness, and a failed *Lord of the Rings* costume earlier in the month left me burned out though. I never should have attempted the last costume with such a tight deadline and so many other things on my plate. *bad, bad Jenny* It was a disaster, a complete and utter disaster which I could not talk about for weeks afterwards. I'm still a bit touchy about it actually. I refer to that project as *The Hades Dress™*. Enough said.

The failure of *The Hades Dress™* hit me hard, eroding a lot of my confidence as a seamstress and a person. I find it hard to separate myself from my projects (and my web sites for that matter). When you invest so much time and effort into something, you are investing a bit of yourself as well. It's hard sometimes not to take failure or criticism personally.

I took a month off sewing to recuperate and reflect. Frankly I wasn't sure that I wanted to continue costuming any longer. My sabbatical turned out to be just what I needed. It gave me a chance to think and pray about my motivations and attitudes. I don't understand why, but God has given me the talent, passion, grace and resources for this "art". Although I'm unsure of His purpose, I have faith that there is one; I just need to be faithful when He calls. I also know that no matter how I fail and falter, He loves me. No matter what.

The sabbatical also gave me time to scheme, plan and research my next projects. After *The Hades Dress™*, I was determined to conquer the late gothic/fantasy style and I began the year with a second *Lord of the Rings* project. It took me nearly six months to complete, but I did make a lovely [Eowyn gown](#). The gown is not exactly the ensemble I had envisioned in the beginning, but I must say I'm rather proud of it. This was the first gown pattern I draped from scratch, the first fabric I custom dyed (the silk sleeve lining) and the first garment I have ever made out of velvet. This project had more than its fair share of set backs and at times it took pure will power and God's grace just to see it through. Yes, I'm rather proud of it indeed! :>

I've made a [fair few costumes](#) this year, in addition to everyday clothes and other projects. In March I completed a [1950's dress and petticoat](#) for Bridget and a [1940's bodice & skirt](#) for myself. We wore them to a "retro" party given by some friends. Although I wasn't 100% happy with the results, it was fun to put on red lipstick and do up my hair like Betty Grable! For the Maryland Renaissance Faire in August I made Bridget an [Elvish gown](#) and for myself, a [15th century Italian peasant costume](#). Bridget and I really enjoyed collaborating on her gown. I draped the pattern and made the garment, and then she embellished it. It's

thoroughly disgusting that she can do math and beadwork too!! In October I completed three parts of my most ambitious project to date. A [late eighteenth century outfit](#) has been on "my list" for many years now but has continually been pushed aside for other projects. I decided that *this* is the year to finally begin. I have been having way too much fun with it so far! I am such a sucker for eighteenth century prettiness. :>

In April I loaned several of my costumes to a friend in San Diego. She used them in a little fashion show, something for her church's women's group. I have to admit sending my "babies" to the other side of the country was harder than I thought it would be! It was very surreal to [see pics](#) where all the gowns in the program were my creations. I was also surreal to see them on ladies I didn't even know! :>

I have matured so much as a seamstress in the past year. Each project increases my knowledge and skill. I am convinced that sewing is at least 85% experience if not more. The more I sew the better I become and the more I love it. I have been so blessed by generous costuming friends this year as well. I am a part of a wonderful group of online sewing buddies that offer advice, support, research, encouragement and occasionally sewing supplies. It is one of the things I love best about this hobby - one meets such sweet and generous folk.

This year has held more than sewing delights however. In March we took a family vacation to Florida. It was a wonderful time, not only seeing the sites but also just spending quality time together. We managed to have a nice balance of sight-seeing and relaxing days. For the first few days we stayed in Melbourne with friends. We did a lot of relaxing (and eating! :>) at their house but we also visited the beach and spent two days at the [Kennedy Space Center](#). I enjoyed the KSC immensely. You probably wouldn't think it to look at me but, the early space program fascinates me. The highlight of the experience was definitely seeing a real [Saturn V rocket](#) in person. Getting a man on the moon... very cool stuff indeed!

We then stayed a few days in Orlando, spending one of them at Disneyworld; at Epcot, to be specific. We basically ate and shopped our way through the World Showcase. We had lunch in Mexico, French pastries for dessert, an American funnel cake for a snack and lots of favorite British candy for additional snacking. Very good eats indeed! After a full day of rest and relaxation afterwards, we headed home. It was nice to be home again (sleep in my own bed, etc) but it was a total bummer to come home to 40°F weather! Blah!

In May Bridget and I spent a week in London. The trip was a gift from Mom and Dad. The deal was, if Bridget graduated from college (her Associates degree) with a 4.0 GPA she and a companion (me!) could go anywhere in the world. We thought about a lot of places, but we eventually picked London. Our friend Maegan came as well, which made the trip even more fun. This was my first international trip in three years and I was SO ready to get out of Virginia! Okay so that's an understatement. :>

I had a really wonderful trip. I was ready to come home when we did, but I loved the time we had there. We managed to pack in a good amount of site-seeing but we were also able to take time to just sit and enjoy the experience. We stayed in Bayswater, a few blocks from Paddington station and Hyde Park. It was a really great location, even if the room was rather cramped. (Yet another understatement!!)

It's nearly impossible to pick my favorite place this trip. I have wonderful memories of our picnics & rambles in Hyde & Green Park but I **had** to pick, I'd say it was our time in the [Victoria & Albert Museum](#). It's my favorite museum in London, mostly because the V&A has one of the best costume collections in the world. Unfortunately the costume galleries were closed for renovation work while we were there. I was bummed, but I had seen the collection twice before so I wasn't **too** put out about it. Next time, right? :>

The closure of the dress gallery gave me a chance to see more of the museum. Besides, there were pieces of clothing in the British Galleries (c1500-1900), plus the contents of the textile rooms to drool over. Bridget was very sweet and took notes of everything while I photographed my favorite things, saving me a lot of hassle; except in the textile rooms that is. Bridget wandered off and left me to do my drooling all alone there. :>

For those that have not been to the V&A, the textile room is filled with cases, which are in turn filled with historical textiles mounted in large frames. The frames can be pulled out and taken to desks that line the walls for study, photography, or sketching. I looked primarily at the 16th and 18th century embroidery pieces. I think the thing that amazed me the most was the size of the stitching; it was all tiny, all of it. As in half the size of my stitches. *sigh* And I thought I could embroider! I studied and photographed my favorite pieces before Bridget came to fetch me away. We spent the day wandering around the museum, mostly in sections I had not been into before, such as the Tea rooms (William Morris designs... drool!), the lace rooms and the Devonshire Hunting Tapestry gallery. *gasp* So much to see and so little time to soak it all in...

There was a series of concerts in the Raphael rooms that afternoon (an enormous high vaulted-ceiling room full of large Raphael paintings). We were able to sit down and listen to the last of the concert. The best was the soprano. Mozart's *Alleluia* and *Musetta's Waltz* from *La Bohème* were wonderful songs for the venue and the perfect way to end the day. By the end of the concert, both my feet and my soul had been refreshed, even if my brain was still very, very full. :>

I thoroughly enjoyed our time at the [British Museum](#) as well. Bridget went to London specifically to see the BM's Egyptian collection, so she had a very specific plan of what she wanted to see and a very slow pace at which she wanted to see it. Maegan and I soon left her behind and wandered all over the museum together. I really enjoyed seeing everything with my own eyes. Pictures just don't do this stuff justice. I loved the Medieval rooms, all things gothic being my current interest du jour. The [Sutton Hoo](#) collection was pretty cool, but I think my favorite thing would be the [Lewis chessmen](#). I splurged on a reproduction of one of the pieces and a book on the collection. I also enjoyed seeing the 16th, 18th and 19th century jewelry. I came away with good ideas for costume accessories. :>

Another highlight of the trip was meeting [Mrs. Suzi Clarke](#). Suzi is an amazingly talented professional costumier I'd met online. I have to admit I was a bit nervous (I tend to be rather shy with people at first) but I could **not** pass up the opportunity to meet her in person. I'm so glad I did! She was really lovely and put me at ease right away. We met at the [Museum of London](#) café, ate lunch and talked for a little while, then headed into the museum. Suzi showed me some of the fashion highlights there and we had a chance to talk "shop" as we looked around. I wish we could have had more time together; she is such a fount of knowledge. Of course, I probably would have said that no matter how long the visit had been. :>

We did and saw so much more but I'll spare y'all. If you really want to hear all the juicy details, I've posted a [trip diary](#) (including pictures) in my [online sewing journal](#).

In July I became the official owner of a cat! I've never had one of my very own, all the previous felines being family cats. I named her Nefret, which means "beautiful one" in ancient Egyptian. She has an Egyptian cat look to her so naming her after a 12th Dynasty Pharaoh's mother seemed appropriate.

Nefret was one of a litter of kittens born in April to our newest cat, Tommy-girl. Tommy and the kittens were wild, feral cats until June when we brought them in the house and domesticated them. The plan was to keep Tommy and give away her three kittens. We got rid of two, leaving the baby. We tried to give her away too, at first. The longer she stayed the more attached I became, until I asked if I could adopt her, paying for her shots and upkeep out of my income. Four cats in the house is probably a bit much, but I couldn't resist so much kitty cuteness.

Nefret is seven months old now and is currently recovering nicely from being fixed. :> She is a sweet thing, very cuddly and affectionate. She really has the cutest personality, despite being rather hyper most days. She is still a kitten after all. Christmas should be fun once we finish getting all the decorations up! :>

Bridget left in September for Richmond and Virginia Commonwealth University's (VCU) biomedical engineering course. We spent as much time together as we could over the summer, visiting with friends, going to [Renaissance Faires](#), shopping and playing endless games of Uno (in which I typically creamed her, I might add. :>). Adjusting to her not being in the house has been hard. She calls often and comes home most weekends but it is just not the same. *pouts*

In October I celebrated my 25th birthday with an old fashioned slumber party. Mom and Dad wisely left for the weekend and I decorated the house in pink and black crepe paper, scented candles and orchids. It was a fun party. We drank our pink sparkling lemonade in martini glasses, ate tons of junk food, played games, talked, played kazoos to the point of silliness and giggled way too much. Two of the party went to bed about 12:30am but the rest of us stayed up until 5am. A light breakfast late the next morning was a lovely way to end the fun, especially with the Krispy Kreme doughnuts Bridget brought from Richmond. I was even blessed by cards and gifts from my online sewing buddies on the occasion. *sigh* I am so blessed, it just isn't even funny.

So what am I up to these days? I am still a stay-at-home-daughter so I'm mostly busy with everyday things; laundry, dishes, shopping etc. I'm now in charge of making dinner twice a week, so my cooking skills are slowly improving (I hope!). Practice makes perfect with this housekeeping stuff, right? :> I'm currently in the midst of four sewing projects, banners to decorate our upcoming Twelfth Night party, a re-vamp of Bridget's Elvish dress, a kimono-wrap for me and the late eighteenth century outfit.

I continue to maintain four websites, my church [CCFred](#), [CSN•Virginia](#), and my [two personal](#) websites. I resigned from the other site I was involved in, [In Timely Fashion](#) this summer.

Before I left the editor team I did have [an article published](#) on the site though. The websites are always a mixed blessing, frustrating, encouraging, stressful, and a fun creative outlet all at the same time.

I am still singing on the worship team on Wednesday nights, and have recently become involved in a quilting fellowship at church. The quilting fellowship's purpose right now is to catch up on the current backlog of baby quilts. It's been really lovely to be able to use my sewing talents and skills to bless others. Sometimes I feel like I am very selfish with the talent, passion, and resources God has given me; just making clothes for Bridget and I. It's great to be able to use them for God's glory in some small way.

I'm also having fun, learning from the more experienced quilters in the group and getting to know them better. I have been incredibly blessed by their fellowship, encouragement, and generosity. I love my God; I go to this fellowship to bless others, to use the talents God has given me for Him and then He turns around and blesses my obedience. I love how you can never out give Him.

Despite my down days (many, many of them), my failures, and my sinful heart, God continues hold me tight and to provide for all of my needs in unexpected ways. It's all just a series of coincidences, those little things that keep me going and make me smile, you say? Well, I don't believe in coincidence. I believe in Jesus, my savior, my friend, my God.

So that's my life right now - never dull, even when I'm not creating my own sewing drama!

I wish you have a very merry Christmas & an extremely happy New Year!
Love & Christmas Kisses,

Jenny-Rose