

Ha! I bet you ripped open this envelope hoping to find a Christmas letter written by the always-funny Mick Brown, didn't you? Wondering who would be getting the brunt of the jokes this year (well, besides Mom, of course)? Well, that's what the other letter is. But this year I have now decided that I would quiet my father by proving that a Communication degree isn't a complete waste of time by writing the family Christmas letter. I bet you've already noticed the lack of spelling mistakes, haven't you?

Alright, instead of starting off with the eldest (take that Dad!), I'll start with G-man. Little Miss Soccer Star, as I call him, has both Mom and Dad running after him whenever he mentions playing for the England national team. Must be a tough life. Every time I come home he's showing off his new cleats/jersey/co-MVP trophy and telling stories of his 8-hour road trips to play in some remote soccer tournament against Canadians, or whatever. Mom and Dad's recollection of the trips usually differ, only because they use it as an excuse to find a new brewery to inhabit. So much has changed. Every week I get a phone call from the little bugger telling me how much better he is than me at soccer. "Hey Andrew, guess what? I got voted to the All-State team. Did you? No?" Luckily, he still hasn't been voted team MVP, so I have that against him (and no, Co-MVP doesn't count).

Stephen is 18, graduated high school (yes, I'm as surprised as you are), and off harassing those limeys-er, relatives. Gregory is completely lost without him, and offers up the obligatory "Steve Brown is the MAN!" every time his name comes up in conversation. Since it was Stephen's 18th, Dad did his whole "I'll take you anywhere in the world for your 18th birthday." Apparently Stephen couldn't wait out a 7-hour plane flight to start drinking, so Dad borrowed his friend's Porsche 911 and let Stephen drive to Canada for the Formula 1 Grand Prix (yeah, right). Yes, you read that right. A friend of Dad's actually let Stephen Brown, who holds the record for having his license a mere 2 days before mounting another vehicle, drive his Porsche 911. And yes, he was warned about Stephen's track record. The house seems much emptier now that Stephen is gone; his friends still randomly appear in some room of the house, not aware that Stephen himself is no longer in the country. "No, really... Stephen's not here. No, you can't wait for him to get home, he's in England. Yes, I'm serious. Who are you, anyway?" Anyway, good luck to whoever is taking care of him over there.

Ellie is down in DC at George Washington University, doing...well, the same thing she always does. What that is, I'm not sure, but whatever it is she's doing it well I imagine. After complaining (Ellie? Complain? You jest...) about having nobody to drink with on her 21st birthday (that's what happens when your friends are all 19), her older (I refrain from using the term "grown up") cousin Michelle decided to take a couple of weeks off and take her out for a drink. Ummm...right. Anyway, I'm sure you can just imagine the fun the two of them had in the middle of DC, although I'm not sure the same can be said for the citizens of DC. Ellie also now has a boyfriend, who has come up to visit the family on a couple occasions. Poor guy. And he seems so normal!

Mother dearest, or "Mama-dukes" as she is now affectionately called (except by Dad, but those names aren't printable), is still doing the whole "Montessori" thing, and apparently doing it rather well. I no longer call the house to talk to her; I have learned that doing so only results in Gregs or Dad lovingly asking me "Where the (bleep) do you think she is?" Oh, right. I'll try the school. When she is at home, she's either swearing at the computer ("Why won't this print?" "Mom, try turning the printer on...") or looking for one of her 30 pairs of reading glasses, then making fish faces once she puts them on. So much has changed.

And now Dad. For those of you who know my father...I apologize. The man has the most annoying gift of being quite good at whatever he seems to try. In true Mick Brown fashion, he has been going over the top on his D.I.Y. projects for the house. In addition to creating a computer that will hold every song on every CD that the family owns (and then burning those CDs onto said computer), his latest project seems to be painting random walls in the house a bright shade of [insert color here]. The music computer is a wonderful device full of Grateful Dead, Phish, and his newest favorite, Wyclef Jean (yup, Dad's now into rap...some things have changed!). Oh, and there's some of our music on it as well. Anyway, apparently the colored walls have something to do with converting the basement into a home theatre, but his plans on that topic are rather...shall we say, elaborate. "So, I was going to get a big plasma TV for the basement, but then I thought we'd need new couches, but there's not enough room for that, so I'm gonna build stadium seating, but I want to turn the stadium platform into a subwoofer, so I painted the stairwell bright blue." Of course. Makes sense. I imagine this project will come to fruition shortly after the extension to the deck is completed.

I suppose I should talk about myself now, but there's one other member of the family who rarely gets mentioned in these letters: Danny. For those who don't know, Danny is the kid that lives (read: used to live) down the street from us. Age-wise, he's in between Stephen and Gregory, and fits in the family better than I do. Danny now lives at the Brown house more than Mom, and has recently become my replacement on family trips ("Can I come to DC with you?" "No, there's not enough room in the car. Danny's coming."). He is Mom's favorite son, possibly because he's the only one that still calls her something besides "Momma-dukes." I believe he actually does chores now, which intrigues me only because he's the only one who has ever done chores in the Brown family.

Alright, I've put it off enough. I'm the same as I always am, minus the failing out of college and crashing cars. In fact, I (along with my brothers) have been given the old family minivan (named "Chewie" due to the Chewbacca-esque noises emanating from the steering column). Mama-dukes decided that driving around in a minivan that was missing hubcaps was not professional and made the mistake of letting myself and Stephen buy replacements. Four spinning hubcaps and two paint jobs later, the van was ours. From flames and racing stripes, to the Ninja Turtles theme, I have yet to lose it in a parking lot. Beautiful. Wait, painting things bright colors? Wonder where that came from? Apart from that, I'm doing fine. Thanks for asking. Would you like fries with that?

Anyway, as you can see, not much has changed. We're still the same comically dysfunctional family as we've always been, and will continue to be. Hope we've managed to entertain you for another year, and we hope your's has gone well. Merry Christmas.