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Dear ,

O.K. Can I get round to a quick Christmas letter this year? My apologies for not including one last year. I'm afraid my Dad died quite suddenly in early December, so life was rather weird; hence the omission. He had been rather poorly since the April, but we hoped he was on the road to recovery. It was not to be and it was rather tough on everyone, especially Mum. Now, a year later, the feelings we have are still surprising fresh.

Anyway, it is now 2 years since I was last in touch, although I got to see quite a few people in the summer of 1990. Goodness, that seems ages ago and, if my memory serves me well, it was hard work dragging all 4 of them around with me! The difference 18 months make. The most delightful change is that we are now a diaper-free household, after 8 years!! I find that you regret the passage of some of the events of babyhood, but diaper-changing is not among them! I now feel I'm on some sort of rest-cure. Andrew is 8 and Ellie turns 7 next week, and they both go off to school on the yellow school bus every morning at 8a.m. Stephen and Gregory go to the local pre-school, 5 and 3 mornings respectively, which means that "the mother" finally gets 9 hours a week to do with as she pleases! Heaven. I've made a resolution not to do household chores in those precious hours. Playing music loudly and quilting are favoured pastimes! And Christmas shopping has been much more fun this time around. So, I feel like a new woman, with only a few pangs of guilt. Mind, my New Year's resolution is to put some research into my future plans; see if I can find employment I'd enjoy. Tough to do, after 10 years of pleasing myself!

News of everyone else. Mick quit Octocom 18 months ago; had enough of the despot running it, finally. Working as a consultant for now, sometimes from home. Contrary to expectations, we all enjoy him being in the house: thought it'd drive us both crazy, but it works well. Other times, he's been out on the West coast, working for a start-up (again) and sampling life, Californian-style. Not as bad as we'd been led to believe, but not that attractive at the end of the day, at least not in northern L.A. But the weather! Hot, dry, sunny and no bugs! That bit does appeal.

Andrew is 3rd grade (I know, totally meaningless to you). The local school system has just set up a small pilot multi-age classroom, so we volunteered him for that. So, we're watching his progress with interest. Americans, I've decided, have a totally different concept of schooling. Their main priority is to ensure that the children enjoy themselves, and don't feel too pressured or out of their depth. Praiseworthy in a way, but it often means that no-one is particularly stretched, just in case. So, the curricula seem very tame, by English standards, anyway, and being an "A" student takes little effort for

some kids. I'm hoping that by being in a multi-age setting, the pace might pick up, somewhat. Andrew, being Andrew, happily cruises along, doing well, but saving his enthusiasm for any form of sport, instead. Having an 8 yr. old in the house feels very pleasant, too; I enjoy the company and conversation of the older kids.

Ellie is in 1st grade and loves every minute. Her teacher is Christina Sununu, daughter of the famous John; happily, she appears markedly different from her father. Ellie herself is in the "losing teeth" stage. We threatened to paint her face orange and send her out as a jack o' lantern for Halloween! She's another one that's growing up quickly.

Stephen is still the same talker that he's always been. Caught him telling his grandma, on the phone last night, that his mum didn't let him speak on the phone for long, but when he was "an adult", he'd do it as much as he wanted. Still on the little side, which makes it all the more amusing to hear him sounding older than expected.

And Gregory, 3 yesterday, plays "catch up" with everyone else. Amazes me what he can do for himself, compared to, say, Andrew, at the same age. He looks very close to Steph. in age and is pretty well co-ordinated, and sometimes you find yourself forgetting how young he is. No doubt quite common with the no. 4 child!

So, that's all of us. Still in the same house (outgrowing it fast, though), and still giving out the usual invitation to come and visit. Come sample life with a typical suburban American family; did I tell you that I'm thinking of applying for citizenship next year? Mind you, every time I think of it, something puts me off the idea. The latest episode was the Clarence Thomas hearings! Only in America!!

Anyway, I wish you all the best for Christmas, and for the year of 1992. Hope life is treating you kindly and remember that invitation. Until next year, take care,

love from,