

#9.
5 Stone Post Road
Salem NH 03079

Sunday December 1 1996

Dear

New address! New house! Old author of the Christmas letter!! Ah well.

Merry Christmas to everyone. I've just sat and re-read all the letters and notes we got last year. It's actually one of my favorite parts of Christmas, thinking about old friends, as I write out my cards. Our thanks to everyone that sends their news back to us. I love to get updates on how you are doing and I have no objections at all to duplicated letters!

I'm sat on the old couch in the new front room (isn't it amazing how old your furniture looks in a brand new house?) with a Bud Light in one hand and my own choice of music on the stereo. What more could a woman ask for? Well, now you ask.....

We moved into the new house just 10 days ago. Amazing how quickly the six of us can create chaos in a place! But, after spending 3 weeks living in a neighbor's condo, we are delighted to finally be "home" again. We can always spend the next 10 years getting it sorted out. It may take that long, too. There is plenty of unfinished stuff still to do- we just did Thanksgiving without carpets- but it is all minor, compared to actually getting to live here. I'm still pinching myself half the time. It's in the same town- in fact, only about a quarter of a mile from the old place- so it's the perfect move for the children, who don't have to change schools or friends. They just get a bigger house, with a bedroom for each of them, Mick gets his "Jerry Garcia Memorial Library" and I get a pantry! Each to his own!!

So, I suppose you can guess what we spent most of the year doing. Many of our friends over here had given us dire warnings about how destructive building a house could be to marriages, but none of them realised that I'd been dealing with Michael Brown for 17 years and knew exactly how to handle him. Just let him have his way in everything and say "That would be lovely, dear" to everything he chose! It worked beautifully but, if you come over to visit us and hate the house, you know who to tell!!

Children updates. Let's break the habit of a lifetime and start with Gregory. As athletic as ever, especially at soccer, and adores playing the game. Useful for threats (e.g. "you can't go to soccer practice unless you ..."), which we seem to need more with ~~Gregory than with the rest~~ put together! Can't work out whether it is because he is the "baby" of the family (at 8!) or he is just his father's son! Outside of the house, he is quiet, charming, funny, studious and well-behaved. Unbelievable, but better that way than the reverse!

Stephen is still that "Mr. Smiles" of babyhood. A charming 9-year old, he has aged a lot this year, although he still doesn't have the height to match his maturity. Life is sometimes hard for someone with a younger sibling that is taller than you, but he handles it with style. He is relishing the freedom of not sharing a room with his brothers and spends long hours lying on his bed, reading voraciously. So street-smart, but so affectionate. I couldn't ask for better.

Ellie is now at Junior High and has taken to it like a duck to water. Member of the Student Council, school band, and the travel soccer team (quite the achievement for a bookworm), she continues to be the daughter that I'd always quietly hoped for and who, naturally, does not resemble me at all! 12 years old, going on 18, her room is a pig-sty (even in this gorgeous new house!) and she still thinks Mick's jokes are funny. Proof that no-one can be perfect.

Every day, I steel myself to cope with my first born dropping off the teenage abyss, but so far he just hasn't! Andrew, at 13, is certainly spotty, but has yet to develop the attitude I adopted so earnestly at his age. He does think that he knows far more than his mother and father, but this just seems to amuse him right now. Although he has become quite the soccer player (for a Yank), football is still his love and next year he finally gets chance to play, at the High School. It may be a rude awakening: his mother, fan though she is, lives in hope!

Mick has had a fine old time this year. Out of the start-up business (for how long?), he used the 9 to 5 working hours of a consultant's job to do stuff on the house all year long. It has been immensely satisfying for both of us to see his original ideas and plans turn into a real live house. Although in last year's letter he was not planning to swing any hammers, there are plenty of places that bear the marks of his handiwork, especially in the wiring. Apparently, we now have the capability to run NASA from our basement, according to his friends. Computers, telephones, stereo speakers, you name it, we can plug it in, anywhere. Even in the bathroom! And we don't even have a use for the fibre optic stuff..... yet!!

And I am the quiet, gentle, unassuming wife and mother I have always been(!) Every year, I truly believe that life will be calmer and less crazy, but instead, it seems to be just the opposite. Now that I am headed towards full-time work at the Montessori, I am trying to reduce my PTA and committee work. Hard, though, as I really enjoy the people I meet through them both. And I love getting the chance to have my say, as you will probably remember! So, for now, we hurtle along, fitting everything in, just about. I am never to be found without my big black book-an appointment calendar that goes everywhere with me! One day, when the children are grown and gone (tell me that happens!), I may even find myself with not enough to do! Can't wait!!

And that completes our rundown for 1996. We have had visitors from England already and expect plenty more in the near future. We now have even more space to accommodate you, so come on over. We hope you all have a lovely Christmas and New Year and hope to hear from you soon.