

#10

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Sunday December 7 1997

Dear

It's Christmas time again! I just love all this stuff!! Isn't it delightful getting the Christmas boxes up from the basement and pulling them open? I have a ball, reviewing what tacky ornaments the kids made at school last year, and remembering that Mum bought me a gorgeous centerpiece for the table when she visited in 1996. Had to get it all out before I started; my Christmas CD's were in there somewhere and I needed some jolly, jingle bell music on in the background in order to write this letter!

Merry Christmas from the Browns, who are already well into the festive season. We have had an unusually early start to the snow season (well before Thanksgiving) which makes the place look like Winter Wonderland. You find yourself turning on the fire, drinking egg nog and humming Christmas carols. The lake is already frozen and the tree went up last night!

I always think I sound like I'm getting old when I talk about my life flashing past, but truly, 1997 flew. I'd love to say that the house is now beautifully decorated and furnished, but it isn't! It is, however, a lovely place to live and we are very happy here. A bedroom for everyone came just at the right time. Each teenager (and teenager wanna-be) can play their own music and no-one else needs to listen to it! We get 5 different types of music playing at one time in here and we're all perfectly content! The unexpected joys of a large house.

It did take me until Fall to get grass and a few bushes put into the front yard. I think all these posh neighbors thought perhaps that the English didn't do landscaping or something. They were, therefore, all loud in their praises of how lovely it looked when complete! Just relief, methinks. Inside, Mick spent the winter finishing off the basement, so we now have a kind of games room/spare bedroom for all our visitors. Of course, those of you who know Mick will know that it isn't *quite* finished. He needs the spur of a visit from someone to give him that final push. Anyone want to oblige?

The children look less and less like children all the time. Andrew is 5' 10" and fast approaching Mick's height. That, coupled with a deep voice and no metal on the teeth, makes me think we're living with a totally different person. Now a High schooler, at 14, he survived his first taste of actually playing football, in the freshman team. After just gritting his teeth and getting through the first few weeks of fitness training and training camp, his enthusiasm steadily increased as the season progressed. Much to his mother's dismay, of course! It becomes a totally different sport when your beloved first born is out on the field getting hit by some punk!! That, coupled with the erratic successes of my beloved Patriots, has made for a tough season for me!

Ellie is still Ellie. Finally a teenager, and as busy and involved with stuff as ever. She and Mick predictably are finding her adolescence an up-and-down affair! She still thinks he's very funny, if she's in the right mood, and he can't resist her when she's looking for a fight!! I love having a daughter; certainly don't wish for any more, though! How did

my mother do 6 of us? Ellie is also rich beyond belief, having been discovered by all the women in the neighborhood as a baby-sitter. I'm looking forward to my Christmas present from her.

Remember the trombone? And the flute?? Guess what Stephen plays? The baritone! Yes, I know you have no idea what one of those is. Neither did we. So, when he struggled into the front hall with an instrument case that he could hardly pick up, we were filled with foreboding. Rightly so! It's a tuba; not as big as a full-size one, but at least as big as my little Stephen! You can't be anything but impressed with a child who is the smallest in his class, picking the largest instrument on offer. I love it! And play it he does, transporting it from place to place on a luggage trolley! Now 10, in 5th grade but regularly mistaken for 3rd, he is working hard, doing well at school and still smiling.

Gregory is still Mr. Soccer. Would live in his warm-up suit, if his wretched mother would let him. Although just turned 9, he is playing with children a year older and is much more comfortable and still very successful there. At school he is quiet and hard-working, saving louder, more emotional behavior for us! I love watching the look of disbelief flit across teachers' faces when I describe how he is at home. Great company on trips to the supermarket (where I now spend vast amounts of both time and money), especially if he has his own money to spend on sugary cereal, which Mom will never buy!

This year, Mick has discovered something I've known for ages. If you get up early, you can do an unbelievable amount of work before the rest of the world has even opened their eyes! While trying to do two contracts at once (consultants take what's offered; you never know when there will be nothing around!), he picked up the early riser habit. For the first time in 18 years of marriage, we have the same bedtime, (it's 10 PM!) and get up at 5.00 a.m! Doesn't that sound frightful? He leaves at 6 am and can easily be back in time for tea. Andrew and Ellie both leave for the bus to the High/Junior High at 6.45 am, so we would need to get up anyway, and traffic is a breeze. With no project on the go, he is catching up on about two years of book reading. Seems odd to see him with his nose in a book so much. Gives me an excuse to do the same thing.

And I am finally working full-time. My friend, part-owner of the school I work at, is on a 6-month sailing vacation in the Caribbean (life's tough, don't you know!), so I'm covering for her. I love my job, our lot cope well with the hour after school on their own, we manage to squeeze everything we need to do into evenings and weekends, but I'm *tired* a lot! Nothing new for most women I know!! It is worth it, though, and I am still a big Montessori fan. Contemplating doing more training, to teach 6-12 year olds. Can I fit it in?? Depends how many people flood across to lay eyes on this mansion? Is it really as big as everyone says?? Come and find out.

Two type-written pages and I seem to have just skimmed the surface of what goes on in our lives. Still, I hope it encourages someone to tell us their news; I love hearing from everyone. Have a wonderful Christmas and New Year and perhaps we may see some of you in 1998.

All our love,