

# 11  
5 Stone Post Road  
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Tuesday, December 8, 1998



Dear

Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas! The letter is late, but for the first time ever, I've got some jolly Christmas lights up outside the house. I'm thrilled, even if we look rather pathetic and weedy compared to some of the much grander illuminations that are to be found on our street. I am here to tell you that decorating even what looks like a small tree *outside* is a sight more hard work than any indoor Christmas tree. Stephen and I looked pretty funny stumbling around in the dark, wobbling away on the high chair that had got stuck in the grass, but we are very proud of the results. Maybe that could be our Christmas photo next year.

As you can see from this year's photo, I am slowly shrinking. It is certainly a little disconcerting to look at someone who now stands 6' tall and recall that you actually gave birth to him, but I don't let any of it intimidate me. At least I still have Tweedledum and Tweedledumber to tower above. And I can manage to see eye-to-eye with Ellie whenever the need arises!

The sharper ones among you may spot the England shirt on Gregory. Proof that we are not completely Americanized just yet and also proof that someone was in England recently. Mick's mother passed away quite suddenly last month and he went back for the funeral. There is something sad and complete about losing both your parents. I dread the day.

Mick continues at 3COM, hovering in consultant-land, and thus not suffering the annoyances of actually being part of a large corporation. It seems to generate less excitement but a sight more money, so not to be sniffed at, at least for now. The possibility of having to pay upwards of \$100K for a place at some upmarket college looms large on the horizon. This is when we wonder whether all that pushing to do well at school was really a wise choice! Mick still leaves the house at an ungodly hour, but it means he has more dinner times with us, which is lovely. He spends his spare time at Home Depot, always buying just that one thing that he didn't have to complete some little job around the house, and never getting out without spending \$100. Aren't those home improvement places addictive?

Ideas about what he wants to be when he grows up are starting to flit across Andrew's mind. A sophomore at High School and working very hard, a top scorer on the JV soccer team and changing before our very eyes. Isn't it weird to suddenly get a picture of the adults our children will eventually become? With some regrets, but with enormous relief on his mother's part, he has left the football team and returned to soccer. It must be said that the year of football appears to have made him a better soccer player. And, at 15 and a half, he is officially allowed to drive in the company of an adult. Now that is scarier than the college fees! I can now detect that look that I always wore when I was 15. You know, the one that says "How can my mother know so little and still have managed to function in the world up to now?" Luckily it is worn with humor, so I have no complaints.

Ellie continues to be both her mother's and her father's daughter, which is more of a positive comment than you would think! She appreciates Mick's warped sense of humor, which is quite something for an American, but is bright enough to push his buttons

whenever she wants to. She is up for anything new and tackles it all with great enthusiasm. Then there is a part of her that is her alone, because she still works very hard and gets great grades at school, while managing to fit in soccer teams, Student Council positions and Jazz band with that everlasting flute. And she actually cares about her appearance, which is very un-Brownish, and has lead to a number of angst-ridden moments during the year! Been there, done that; don't you hate some of your adolescent memories?

And Stephen! Now 11, and up at the Junior High, which was a tough transition that he coped with in great style. He also sports the American badge of adolescence, the mouth of metal, and it quickly made a dramatic improvement to his appearance. He has grown up an enormous amount this year, even though it doesn't show on the outside. His conversation, his grades and his ability to organize himself at school, and the way he holds his own in this family, all surprise people that just judge him by his height. Of course, there is still the blessed baritone. He plays it with less skill than we would like, and it is not an instrument that you can screen out easily, but not everyone can be perfect, right?

Still the sportsman of the family, Gregory is mostly to be found outside, replaying imaginary football or soccer games so that the scores represent a more favorable result. He has aspirations to be the king of the house, but the other 5 members of his potential kingdom resist too strongly. He had a dream come true recently, when we were lucky enough to get prized tickets to a New England Patriots game and they beat a big rival, Buffalo, in the last seconds of the 4th quarter. He didn't take his eyes off the field for the entire 3 hours and no doubt will remember it for ever. Such is life in a sports-mad kid's head. Got one of those?

We've finally started to see a bit of America, after living here for 17 years. A long weekend road trip to Niagara Falls was the latest trip. Eight hours in the car each way, but we are well equipped with these Walkman things, so it was amazingly peaceful. In February, we took the kids to Disney, of course. You have to do it once, and waiting until everyone was older was tremendous. One slight glitch was that I hurt my knee the day before we left, so I had to do everything on crutches or in a wheelchair! But that just made the vacation more memorable. Then Mick and I finally took a vacation without the entourage. Flew away to Key West, which was sunny, glamorous and very adult. First time we had gone away together in 15 years, and thankfully we had a ball! When you spend so much time as the Mummy and the Daddy, it crosses your mind to wonder what life will be like when it is just the two of you again. We're here to tell you it will be FUN!

Thank you to those that send their news. It is still my favorite part of Christmas. As I get older and busier, I value even more the chance to touch base with family and friends that I see so infrequently. We just had a visit from a friend that I hadn't seen for 17 years and it was just like I'd seen her the week before (apart from the wrinkles on both of us). So, when we offer a place to stay, please take us up on it, if you can. Plenty of room and charming hosts, especially Stephen. We hope you all have a lovely Christmas and a safe and happy 1999.