

Remember a few years ago when Christine wondered if we would still write these letters if the kids dropped out of school, got pregnant, or ended up in jail? Well, I suppose one out of three ain't bad. No, no one is pregnant; although when I step out of the shower in a certain quality of light from a particular direction I wonder what else could cause my body shape. No jail yet, I think Stephen is putting that off until next year. That leaves Andrew and his jolly escapades at Penn State University. After all, what's the point of an education if you are going to be a rock star?

It came as a revelation to Andrew to discover that if you are free to do what you like, you don't have to study, especially without Christine and her continuous "homework or I rip your leg off" lectures. So, he's taking some time out to goof off without us having to pay for it. Jobs as dishwasher, bar worker (in a Liverpool city center Pub - how glamorous), and eventually as a global tourism business executive, i.e. working in a ski resort in Austria for the season. Back to school next year unless the rock career takes off. Andrew jetted home for Thanksgiving, as all good American children should. Not that we saw much of him. It appears that male siblings communicate with body slams and choke holds. Andrew spent a week rolling around on the floor pummeling Stephen and Gregory, much to their delight. Just like a bunch of demented puppies. I'm now a proponent of family harmony based on WWF rules, the only problem is that the kids would now beat the crap out of me.



Ellie is following the Brown tradition of ramming a motor vehicle into a stationary object. "Doing an Andrew" as we call it. The minivan and a neighbor's garage door - luckily the house is still standing. Why, oh why do we allow women and children to drive?

What's really scary is that Stephen is now learning to drive. "Dad, can we practice handbrake turns?", this from a kid who still asks which way to turn the key to start the engine. I might as well have him ram the truck into something hard and get it over with. None of this sissy automatic crap for Stephen, straight to a manual like a real man. After all, you would never catch Mario Andretti behind the wheel of an automatic.

Ellie is looking at colleges, not the hick town Boonyville State College variety, it's straight to the bright lights of the big city, New York or Washington DC being top of the list. Gregory is amazed she is considering colleges based in places with awful football teams and I tend to agree. Ellie missed the family Thanksgiving this year; she was marching with the school band in the Macy's Day Parade in NYC. An enforced death march through the inner city blight of New York in sub zero temperatures dressed in ridiculous uniforms, sneered at by crack addicted New Yorkers, and following a 25 foot inflatable pig - of course she had a great time.

With Andrew away, the house seems empty, a mere five of us, although Gregory is doing his part to keep the noise level up. Gregory, the baby of the family is 14 now and still a total sports nut, never to be found wearing anything but a football jersey. I don't mean he is naked besides the jersey, you know what I mean. "Dad, what would you do if you didn't have me to talk about sports with?". Damn he's right! When he leaves home I'll have to go with him.

I think Christine still lives here; she stops by between quilt groups, book group, choir, school committees, political meetings, and any other opportunity to give her opinion on something. Speaking of politics she has become a raving democrat, - Hillary Clinton for president - no, I'm serious that bit isn't a joke (it's only a joke if she is elected). She reads the newspaper with comments like "How can Bush do that?", "It's an outrage!". I never know the subject of the diatribe but somehow its all my fault for not doing something about it.

The year started out in great style with the Patriots winning the Superbowl. The "World Champion New England Patriots" just rolls off the tongue. The added benefit is that it pisses off all the English when they are referred to as World Champions. Other family news includes Ellie turning 18 and in the great Brown tradition I took her on a trip for her birthday. We visited Barcelona and both had an excellent time apart from her steering me away from the rowdy bars and other seedy haunts. One memorable event was something I have been promising myself for many years, an attempt on Mount Washington - at 6,000' the world's tallest mountain (well it seemed that way). Both Christine and I climbed the thing but at different times, I guess there ain't no mountain big enough to cope with us both together.

That about sums it up for another year. Have a great Christmas and an even better 2003.

