

The weather outside is frightful but the football on TV is delightful - December 7th and we have snow up the whazoo (and I have a mighty big whazoo). A great excuse to sit in front of the fire drinking beer and watching the Patriots. Not that the weather makes a difference, it just eases the guilt a little.

None of us will watch the game with Christine, she tends to get a little excited and has been known to raise her voice at times (her father lives on in spirit). At the moment she is screaming and spitting bits of ham sandwich at the TV. In a very delicate and lady-like way of course. She has mellowed as she grows older and rarely has an opinion and in the rare occasion she does she is very shy about expressing it. Hah! Before I introduce people to Christine I warn them to avoid asking what this Montessori stuff is all about unless they have a spare hour. And as for politics, definitely not a place to go. I wanted to place a Schwarzenegger placard on the front lawn (boy, wouldn't an Arnie bumper sticker look good on the truck) but Christine pointed out that we don't live in California. So what! She eventually persuaded me by insisting that she would get a Hilary placard to complement it. I mean - there's no need to get ridiculous.



Can you believe we will celebrate our 25th wedding anniversary in April (assuming we make it that far). Twenty-five years of living hell is how I usually phrase it, and that's the good bits. The first 15 years were the worst and it went steadily downhill from there. Only old people are married that long, there must be some mistake, we can't be that old. Come to think about it I do drink less beer and go to bed earlier these days, and I've really cut down on the intravenous

drugs and ecstasy raves. Of course Christine compensates for my reduced beer intake in line with the conservation of alcohol theorem. She claims it's the only reason she has survived the past quarter of a century of domestic bliss. Quarter of a century! It seems more of a miracle phrased like that. Admit it, I bet you never thought we would make it this long without the phrase "innocent by reason of insanity" being used.

Andrew is now 20 - only another 6 months before he can drink (yeah, right). He grew up a lot in his escapades in England and Austria, and is now happily partying his way through the University of New Hampshire. In his rare visits he breezes in, dumps his laundry, empties the fridge, pummels the boys, stays out all night with his buddies, sleeps all day and disappears back to UNH. Lucky bastard!

Ellie (just turned 19) saw Andrew have such a great time goofing off for a year she left for England within days of graduating from high school. Her first job was being Ellie Poppins -

nannying for 3 small kids in Windsor. She found out that looking after kids is really tough - every morning the whole thing starts all over again. Really? I hadn't noticed. One positive result - I bet she doesn't have kids for a while. She's hoping to head back to Spain or somewhere warm after the holidays. Anyone that knows of a high paid job suitable for the most talented, smartest girl in the world let me know.

That just leaves the little-uns at home, Stephen (16) and Gregory (15). By little I mean not quite 6' yet. Charming little cherubs, they always obey their parents, tidy their rooms, and never leave every damn light in the damn house on 24 hours a damn day. The house is always full of deep booming voices (and not just Christine's). If I answer the phone and it's for Christine I often get mistaken for one of the boys and get asked, "Is your mother home?" "No, my mother is dead!" You know some people just don't have a sense of humor.

Gregory is the bouncy presence in the house. It seems like he is trying to make up for the older kids' absence. He still can't walk around the house without a football, baseball, or hockey stick. "Bring it on dad, think you're a tough big guy? Come on pork chop".... "ow, ow, quit it, QUIT IT".... "So, think you are tough eh? Lets rumble old man".... "ow, ow...." Many hours of good clean family fun.

"What" you are thinking, no story of any of my children's driving mishaps? Fear not, Ellie came through again. In an attempt to up the stakes for the younger kids she went for the gold and drove one car into another in our own driveway. Apparently it wasn't her fault, so that's OK then, obviously no point in me getting mad. Is it a coincidence my body shop guy just had an in-ground swimming pool installed?

This teaching kids to drive is getting a bit old, though in some ways it's preferable to seeing them drive off in the car by themselves. Stephen is the one currently inflicting us with the smell of burning clutch plates accompanied by the noise of gears being ground to filings. Obviously he can drive much better than his dopey old parents who only have 60 years experience between them (good grief, I really am getting old). He was driving the other night without his glasses. "Don't you need your glasses to drive?". "It's OK dad, I know the way". Only one more to go before the twitch disappears.

That's it for another year in the life of the Browns. Have a great Christmas and a wonderful 2004, and don't forget to turn off the damn lights.