

Surely it's not time for another Christmas letter, it seems like I wrote one a few months ago. Surely I'm not 50 with have 4 grown kids. Surely there must be some mistake; someone else must be living my real life as a drunken unwashed student. Where does time go and what's all this crap about getting wiser and more mature as you age. Well, I'm still waiting.....

The house is getting bigger and quieter these days with only Gregory left at home. It's interesting that having lived together for so long, Christine and I are eventually starting to rub off on each other. In fact it's so noticeable that there is a perceived personality swap going on. Christine has taken to irrational hatreds (historically one of my fortes); such inane things as shopping at Sears, cell-phones, driving the truck and George Bush (well, maybe not all are irrational). When she is in full Sears-hating mode I just tell her to "Chill babe!" which is the thing she hates most of all. It's quite funny really as long as you aren't standing too close. I, on the other hand am getting quite personable - well for me anyway. It's all relative. Now and then I deign to acknowledge people's presence and sometimes even manage more than my usual cheerful greeting sneer.

The big issue in the house at the moment is both of us needing reading glasses, but the great part is my eyesight is deteriorating several months behind hers. I squint nonchalantly at the Boston Globe over breakfast pretending to be absorbed but barely making out the odd word. It drives her nuts. She hates her glasses and hates losing them. "I hate it when you read without glasses!". "Chill babe!".

Stephen graduated from High School this year and is currently bumming around England annoying his extended family. He turned 18 in May, a real man in all respects apart from being 3 years away from the legal drinking age. For his birthday I took him to Montreal for the weekend. The reason for picking Montreal was to visit the F1 Grand Prix races, and absolutely nothing to do with the drinking age being 18, just a happy coincidence. We had a great time, or so people tell me. The F1 race was fascinating but paled in comparison to the extra curricular activities. A friend of mine lent me his Porsche



911 for the trip (some friend huh) and suggested Stephen "Destruction Derby" Brown drive it. I explained the years of rusting hulks left trailing in Stephen's wake but he insisted anyway, although I noticed he increased his Valium intake for the weekend. The drive was uneventful in a scarred-for-life kind of way. Rule 1: when driving over 100mph, get your ***** arm inside the ***** window and put it on the ***** steering wheel.



I always dreamed of owning a Porsche when I eventually grew up. A stretch maybe, but at least a Lotus or a Maserati. Well, we did buy a new car, not a Porsche but close, a minivan. We are now the proud

owners of two minivans. Yes, I've become a soccer mom! We donated the old dented purple minivan (affectionately named "Chewy" for the Chewbacka-like noises the power steering makes) to the kids as the beater car. Stephen asked me if he could paint it. Sure why not, it can't make it any worse. Hah! Matt black with silver waves and fluorescent orange details, fake exhaust pipes, and the finishing touch - rotating plastic hubcaps. It wouldn't have been so bad if the kids drove it all the time, but they bugger off in the other vehicles so Christine and I end up with the damn thing. You forget you're driving it and wonder why everyone is waving and laughing. Teenagers pull up alongside and tell us what a awesome pimpin' ride it is, dude! I think it's quite cool, but Christine hates it.

Stephen's absence makes a huge difference to the house decibel levels. Not so much him, but the hordes of friends he attracted who used the house as a youth club. Even though he's abroad some of his friends still walk into the house as though they live here. "Hi Mr. Brown how're things". "Why are you here? Go home.". "You're so funny Mr. Brown". "No, I'm mean it; sod off". "Ha ha, you're such a character", "I'm serious; now bugger off". "Hee hee". They just don't seem to get my subtle hints.

Gregory is 17 and feeling pretty lonely since Stephen left. They got on great together the past few years, putting up a united front against the tyrannical Christine administration. Now he's flying solo, Christine can turn her undivided attention to his academic progress, the poor little bugger. One slight deviation and the Bismarck turns broadside, all guns training on the hapless target. Saved only by the surgically implanted iPod headphones. Apart from the close attention he's doing fine. His life still revolves around soccer; he even started coaching a U6 team. "Dad, I put all the cones out and a kid walks behind me and puts them on his head, then calls me a booger head". The worst part is that the parents are watching so no slapping the little buggers. My advice to him - leave no visible marks, psychological damage is far more lasting. I suspect after the last game of the season one parent will spend the evening extracting plastic cones from little Justin.



Ellie is in her second year at GWU in DC, doing OK if you KWIM. Her life now evolves around college and cosmopolitan Washington. We are granted a brief visit now and then, when she jets in and out of Boonyville, NH. She copes admirably for up to a whole weekend before the living-at-home-blues starts. Christmas is going to be a long holiday.

Don't get me wrong, she is still the most talented, beautiful, intelligent girl in the world, but that doesn't necessarily make her any easier to live with.



Andrew is now 22 and still a big kid at heart, and I think he always will be. Luckily it suits him. Doing well at UNH an hour north of here, majoring in Communications. A perfect subject if your career goal is to become an unemployed Communications major. He calls by every few weeks to see his favorite family member, the refrigerator. He eats like a horse, drinks like a fish, and smells like a student. Damn it, he's the bastard living my life! I guess that's the way evolution works, Andrew becomes a finer tuned slob than his father. I've always thought that for Intelligent Design to be true, God would need one hell of a sense of humor.

Well, that's about it for another year. Have a happy Christmas and a peaceful new year. I have to dash; I'm off to Sears to buy another cell phone. I think I'll take the truck.

