

Christmas time and the livin' is easy. Well I guess it's all relative. And we all know that relatives are seldom easy. Writing the annual letter is getting harder as the kids leave home. I'm sure they get up to plenty of recordable moments it's just that I don't know about them. I'm pretty sure I don't want to know about most of them. I find it a relief but Christine worries about all the things she's sure they're getting up to.

Just Gregory at home without Stephen to run interference. It's tough being 18 in America; too young to legally drink (you listening Gregory?) especially when it's your father's booze (right Gregory?). His life still revolves around sport (when he's sober). His soccer team did really well in national competitions reaching a couple of finals. This involves a lot of traveling around the country and gives Christine ample opportunity to jolly up the soccer parents. I'm sure you can all picture it. There are soccer clubs from all over the country who remember the loud woman from NH.

I bet you are all eager to know the answer to this years burning question, did Gregory follow the family tradition of denting a car. Rest assured he is a true Brown leaving paint marks on a concrete pillar in Wal-Mart car park. Yes, those 6 foot wide concrete pillars are hard to see in broad daylight. In the past we have made the kids pay for repairs but Gregory never has any money. Little Miss Soccer Star, as Andrew calls him, commits so much time to kicking balls he can't fit in a paying job. He lives off friends' favors and his soft-touch parents. As much as we try it's hard not to go easier on the youngest. Recognizing the problem and fixing it are very different. On the other hand, with just one child at home Christine feels free to cook food she wants to eat. So the kid whose idea of haut cuisine is a super-sized Big Mac (and a glass of beer) has to glumly suffer through couscous soup with lentil garnish.



We see Andrew (23) reasonably regularly at UNH and lives 45 minutes away from home. My project for the summer was going to be building a deck on the back of the house but Andrew used the old "You said you would build a bar next", "I did?", "Don't worry dad, I'll help you build it". And help he did, by keeping the keg nice and light. But I can't complain - I do have a bar in the basement

Andrew is in his final year at UNH (we hope). After 4 years studying communications he makes the obvious career decision and decides he wants to build guitars for a living. I want him to commute 45 minutes to spend each day in an 8' x 10' cubicle like regular working schmucks. He's got to pay his dues to the corporate Gods before doing something cool.

He's still a penniless unwashed student at heart and like all penniless students he did the obvious thing - bought a car. A '95 Oldsmobile 98 gas guzzling behemoth, know affectionately as Val after the Exxon Valdiz - it handles like a boat, drips oil and is commanded by a someone who likes the occasional drink. It's a big car, and as he points out you can fit 4 bodies in the trunk. I hate to think what's he up to.

Stephen left for college this year, George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. Famous for doing well at the basketball playoffs last year and absolutely nothing else. It's a mystery how kids chose colleges, almost as puzzling than where Saddam has hidden all those weapons of mass destruction. George Mason is not far from Ellie (at George Washington University) in DC which they both think is cool. I don't know the attraction to colleges with 'George' in the name. Maybe Gregory will end up at George Bush University, studying international relations at the Baghdad campus. It seems a popular destination for college age boys these days.

Stephen, Mr. Sociable has taken to college life as everyone expected. His first phone call home after a couple of weeks started, "Dad, how do you get a BMW into reverse?" That's the trouble with colleges, they don't teach you the important things in life. I have no doubt college life will suit him fine. The Christmas decoration of two fairy-lighted reindeer humping is a good sign.



Ellie is the hardest one to talk about, probably because she is so perfect. She's doing very well at college, majoring in psychology. It always makes me wary that she's analyzing me whenever she asks any questions. "Dad, what time do you have?" "Don't you start that psycho-crap with me, my girl! Ask your mother." Christine of course is dying to be analyzed but we are all scared of what the results might reveal.

Christine hasn't changed much except for the hair color. All the kids were home for the summer and she couldn't wait for them to leave for college to get some peace and quiet. As soon as they went she was weeping about how much she misses them. Repeat for the rest of her life. In the age of the boomerang generation she might get to see more of them than she bargained for. Hold on a minute: Andrew graduates with a degree in Communications and insists I build a bar in the basement with a plasma HD-TV, hmmm... maybe he's smarter than I thought!

Christine's life still revolves around the Montessori school. The kid's phone home and ask "Is mom there or is she at school". They already know the answer. Being the chief janitor at the school, I seem to be there quite a lot. My weekends usually start with the CEO reading the Janitor a list of structural renovations, electric rewiring, computer fixing and general upkeep of the school, all of which have to be finished before Monday. It's only a matter of time before the school gets its own bar in the basement.

That's about it for another year. Have a jolly Christmas and a great 2007. I'll be spending most of next year in my basement.

