

It's getting tough to write about the family these days. They've all buggered off. Leaving Christine firmly focused on her beloved husband. Gulp! Luckily her voice is totally worn out after decades of heavy use so she rarely talks anymore. She just smiles sweetly and



demurely at my whimsical japes. Married bliss at long last. What's that you say dear? Get you another beer? Certainly.

The empty nest has been great so far, every weekend we take off on a myriad of interesting adventures often focused around keeping the local micro-brewing industry solvent (Christine learning to ride a motorbike was a particular delight to the casual observer). And best of all there are no worries about what the kids are getting up to. It's strange that you worry about all the mischief they get up to when they live at home but as soon as they leave, the

day-to-day worries go away. Of course, they are replaced by big-picture worries but I guess we're stuck with that forever. Really, what's the point of worrying; my beautiful little cherubs would never do all the crap I did at their age. Or at least I won't find out about it. Except when they leave incriminating evidence scattered about the house, eh Gregory?

Did you know there's an election coming up and did you also know Christine is getting excited over the whole thing. Most people within hearing distance have heard. Yes, Salem's own Karl Rove; can't you just picture her now, keeping court in the smoke filled backroom of bars, chewing on a stogie and scheming how to steal the Whitehouse for Hillary. The current tactic seems to be covering the car in Hillary stickers and loudly shouting down anyone who slightly disagrees. So no real difference on how she approaches everything else. I'm dead set against Hillary with all her crazy ideas like universal health care and pulling out of Iraq. What's she trying to do, turn us into a God-hating commie country? If I want crap like that I'll move to Canada.

The youngest, Gregory (of incriminating evidence fame), graduated from High School this year and took off for England before he starts at the University of New Hampshire in January. He's on a mission to teach the English the forgotten art of soccer. It looks like they need all the help they can get these days. Interestingly he thinks the game is much more physical over there but not as technical or as controlled. I can't wait for USA to kick English butt at the next World Cup, in the surprising event that England actually qualifies.

As with all my kids I invite them to go anywhere they choose for their 18th birthday. Gregory

picked Amsterdam. I tried to invoke the non-Amsterdam clause but too late. How many people go to Amsterdam and never see a windmill, tulip, Van Gogh painting or a pair of clogs? As it should be, according to Gregory, what's the point of going all that way just to see a bunch a paintings by some dead Dutch guy. I did see some bizarre things but I'm told that's normal in Amsterdam. Las Vegas is Sin City - you're 'aving a larf mate! Vegas is Slightly Naughty City in comparison. Yes, it was a fine time.

Andrew graduated from college. No it's not a misprint, he really did. As a Communications major he's doing what he's trained for, servicing swimming pools. He claims it's not a very exciting job but I know better, I've seen the movies. He's moved into an apartment with his girlfriend Erin, 20 minutes north of here. In fact you'd think he was a proper grown-up if you didn't know him very well. Now that we are a family full of adults I proposed the idea of changing the Christmas ritual. We must have grown out of getting up at 5:00am, running downstairs and screaming "He's been!" and ripping the sacks to pieces. Nope, Andrew at 24 is having none of it. That's what we do at Christmas. We all humor him and try to keep Santa's identity a secret for one more year.

Ellie will be graduating from George Washington University in May with a degree in Psychology. She spent the summer in inner-city DC teaching kids in a summer program. The only white person in the whole school. The only white person within a mile. Some of the kids had never been close to someone with fair skin before. One of them asked Ellie about the strange birthmarks on her arm. Freckles. Are they painful? Not as painful as being brought up black in inner-city DC.

She managed fine, just as she manages most things - far better than I would. Of all my kids I think she was the one switched at birth. My real daughter is out there somewhere and no she can't come back. I'll keep the one I have.

That just leaves Stephen. He's a tough one to talk about since we never see him. He's still Mr. Social; not with us of course, we are mere family. On his brief visits home he stays long enough to drop his laundry off before going to an endless series of parties. It makes up for his hermit like existence at college where I'm sure he spends all his time studying and making his parents proud. He did make one silly mistake over the summer, he left his Facebook page open on the computer and Ellie and Gregory subtly changed his profile. Interests: "Drinking, Pats, Drinking, Sox, Drinking, Unicorns, Drinking, Pool...", and my favorite in the middle of quotes about drinking and sports and being macho: "Make new friends but keep the old. One is silver the other is gold." We knew all along he has a soft cuddly side. What's really cool was him not realizing for many months and then dropping hints which caused Ellie and Greg to break into giggling fits. After all this time I've found a use for the kids - keeping their parents amused into their dotage.

Stephen mentioned the idea of becoming a policeman recently. Not the British Bobby "'ello, 'ello, 'ello, what 'ave we 'ere then?" type of policeman. More of the car chase, tasing students, abusing speeders, "assume the position" with a big gun type. I put his interest down to the Bush administration's decision to legalize torture. I heard he aced his water-boarding course last semester (a core component of today's business degree). Still, I've got a couple of years to work on him to convince him of a more suitable profession, maybe something in the pool servicing industry.

That's it for another year. Is it me or do the years go by faster these days? I thought things would slow down without kids around but quite the opposite. If only I'd known sooner I could have got rid of them many years ago. Have a great Christmas and New Year.