

Christmas 2001

Dear Friends,

How time flies. It seems like only one year that it was last Christmas. As I size up the kids, it's clear that our practice of feeding them daily has caused a lot of growth, as well as financial strain. I've struggled with solutions to protect our pocketbook. One might be: Boys eat Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Girls eat Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. Everybody can eat on Sunday. After all, it is a family day.

Randi continues to homeschool the children and in my opinion is doing a heroic job, especially given that her own personal education level topped out somewhere in the fourth grade. As she says proudly, three of her happiest school years were the fifth grade. As long as she reads the lessons a week or so ahead of the children, she stays pretty much on top of things. Just last week, Andrew asked, "Why are you our teacher?" Randi replied, "Because I have the answer book."

Speaking of Andrew, age 14, after years of intensive education at Randi's hands, he is finally narrowing down his career goals: computer game tester, or pro baseball player. I suggested psychologist, but Andrew said, "No, Dad, I want to make a difference."

Hannah, age 13, knows two things for certain in her life. One, Dad is embarrassing. And two, Dad is really embarrassing. I told her, "If your eyes keep rolling like that, they're going to stick up there." That was before I showed her friends at her birthday party how to dance "the Swim."

We've made nice encouraging strides with our son, Jon, age 11. His parole officer says he's one of the nicest kids he has. We even got a bumper sticker to celebrate: "Our child was inmate of the month." We hope to attend his graduation soon.

Joanna (11) and Sarah (11) really like to help their mother out around the house. In fact, just last week they helped her around the house and under the van. But I found her later that night when I noticed that someone was missing from the dinner table. Fortunately, duct tape doesn't hold all that well in sub-zero temperatures.

At age nine, Sammy is our model child. In fact, he was the model child for the 2001 issue of "Brat Today", and is currently a finalist for the "Before" picture of "Behavior Modification Monthly." My mom was so proud that she bought copies for all her church friends.

What can I say to share our glow over the little ones, James (6), Mary (5), Peter (4), and Elizabeth (2)? They all get along so well, except if they have to share the same house, room, air, or parents. Actually, I'm exaggerating. As long as no one is looking at another, touching another, or sitting on the wrong side of the car, each adores his siblings. I think we need to find more family activities to forge a better bond. The kids suggested starting their Christmas shoplifting early, but Randi and I don't want to indulge them materially. They can ask the relatives for gifts, just like everyone else. I know that sounds harsh, but we believe parents need to set high standards.

James, age 6, is a first grader now. And he has been making straight A's all year. His B's are a little crooked, but with Randi's guidance, he should master them by the fifth grade. The other kids did.

Our real success case for the year has been Peter. After setting his preschool's record last year for the most time spent in time out, he has really done a turn around, mostly toward the wall. Randi thinks his improvement is due to our consistent discipline, but I think it has more to do with the installment of metal detectors at the classroom door.

And Elizabeth is two. She's the baby, and everybody says we spoil her. That's just not true. We simply find out what she wants and give it to her immediately. There's a big difference between meeting her needs and indulging her.

As for my life, I've experienced some stress-related career problems this past year. My analyst says that I'm a type AAA+ personality where work is involved. So I've realized finally the need to cut back. Instead of my standard, grueling 12-15 hour work week, which I've endured for years, I've finally decided to slow down. This year I'll take two to three days off during the week to better prepare for the week-ends. Last year there were days when I would have to arrive at work at the crack of Noon, work through my lunch hour, putting in three to four hours straight. For me, it's all about commitment.

I'm not one to whine, but there have been times when I've had to speak to groups for an hour straight. From this point forward I will make sure to take breaks every seven to eight minutes during my talk to recoup my energy level.

Perhaps most distressing, I just found out from my orthopedic doctor that I'm at risk to develop bone spurs in my neck from years of nodding and repeating "Uh, huh, tell me more." So I will pretty much just stare at people from now on. After all, if I don't care for myself, I can't care for others.

Well, that's the news from the Guarendi house. Forgive us if we sounded a bit uppity, but sometimes you just need to believe in yourself.

God's peace to all,
The Guarendi's