

Christmas 2002

Dear Friends,

Merry Christmas to all. Well, Randi said don't write a Christmas letter this year, especially after all that uppity crowing I did last year, but I thought, hey, when you're proud of your family, let the world know.

Actually, all has not been roses this year. Randi and I have been getting into some tiffs the last several weeks. Every time we do, she brings up the same theme, "Ray, get out of the '70's." One thing about us husbands, and you can take this to the bank – all our wives have to do is tell us to do something one time, and we do it. So, I figured with Christmas coming, she needed to be taught a lesson about her "Get out of the '70's" refrain. Since I am allowed some of my own money, I got her one of those mood rings. And does it work! When she's in a good mood, it turns green. When she's in a bad mood, it leaves a red mark on my forehead.

The kids are a year older since last Christmas, and Randi and I are six years older. We're still at ten children - five boys and five estrogen-Americans. And the gender differences continue to blossom. Our oldest daughter, Hannah, 14, can run the whole house. Our oldest son, Andrew, 15, is still giving his brother wedgies. These are just not the same species.

Andrew is pushing hard to drive, and he has been begging for four wheels for Christmas, so Randi and I finally broke down and intend to surprise him – we got him two used bikes. Andrew has also abandoned last year's career goals of computer game tester and pro baseball player. He doesn't really know what he wants to do, so I had him vocationally assessed. His results point to two high aptitudes: shepherd or buffet manager. We'll tailor his academics accordingly.

Hannah continues to waffle on a number of related career interests: figure skater, fashion designer, travel consultant, cloistered nun, and U.S. Marine Corps officer. When I asked her what exactly she did want to do someday, she replied, "Maybe design Marine camouflage and pray for world peace while I'm on a 'Stars on Ice' tour in Yemen." I said, "Do you think you could narrow it down a bit? That's what a lot of kids your age want." Her mother and I worry she's just becoming another peer group sheep.

Joanna and Sarah are both twelve, and I guess that number pretty much summarizes their personalities. In fact, next year's number 13, and the year after that, 14, probably say all that needs to be said. Actually, I exaggerate. Why, just last week, Joanna screamed and ran to her room sobbing because Peter, age 5, looked at her, and after she and I talked for 3 ½ hours, she said she realized that she overreacted, because he was probably just looking at her belt and not how big her sweat pants made her bottom look.

Jon is also twelve, but he barely knows he has a belt, much less sisters, brothers and parents. Jon's present life goals are eat, play baseball, eat, watch baseball, and eat while playing baseball. I tell Randi, it's good to see him so focused.

Jon and Sarah are both carrying perfect 4.0 grade averages. Each has a 1.0 in English, 1.0 in math, 1.0 in history, and 1.0 in gym. I think James is jealous.

Sammy, age ten, is trying to decide if education is something he'll need as an adult. The other day his mother asked him to name his favorite place in the United States. He picked Canada. Another fine product of Guarendi Home Academy.

The little ones, James (7), Mary (6), Peter (5), and Elizabeth (3), all sleep in the same room. Actually, they stay awake in the same room...all night...every night...forever. Overall, though, watching them mature has been satisfying. For example, some months back, Peter was chasing his brother, Jon, with a steak knife. After we disarmed, punished, and sent him to bed, his last words were, "I was holding it by the handle!" It warms a parent's heart to see his children embrace proper norms of social interaction.

Mary (6) lives to eat, but she still manages to stay slender. It's not so much that Randi watches her intake. I think it's more because Mary leaks constantly from all of her facial orifices, and drips a lot. We had our carpets cleaned last week, and the guy asked us, "How many pets do you have, and are they house broken?"

Elizabeth (3) continues to be the princess, according to our ill-informed and prejudiced relatives. I don't think they recognize that Lizzy is a very intelligent and creative child. Already she can write most of her ABC's, for all to appreciate – on the front room wall, the bathroom ceiling, the side of my car. I think it takes exceptional motor dexterity to manipulate the mower's handles to form those letters on the car's door.

As for Randi and I, we continue to struggle over one big, recurrent marital issue: Randi does not work for a living, and I am getting a little frustrated being the one who carries the load in our family. We have reached a bit of a compromise. If she insists on homeschooling only ten children, then she will sell Tupperware part time. I mean, I can't keep doing it all.

Speaking of overload, since last year, I've kept my resolve to hold to a ten to fifteen hour work week, per my analyst's orders. Because I've taken on a radio show and am chained to the microphone three hours a week, I've decided I'd best cut back in other areas to keep my career under control. Starting January, I will no longer see any clients, do any consulting, write anything, play with six of the younger children, talk to Randi, or visit my parents. After all, I'm not about to become another middle-aged professional burn out statistic.

Well, that's pretty much the high spots in the Guarendi family this year. We hope your year was as uplifting as ours.

God's peace to all,
The Guarendi's