

Guarendi Greetings

Dear Friends,

Merry and blessed Christmas to you. Thanks be to God we are all able to share another Christmas together.

Randi was against my writing you this year. She says you get enough Christmas letters. You know the kind: “Our daughter, McKenzie (age 11), just finished her twelfth consecutive year of ballet, gymnastics, competition power lifting, and ancient Semitic language scholarship. After her 2004 Olympic trials, she’ll be named the Junior Ambassador to NATO. And just last week, little Marshall celebrated his sixth birthday with surprise visits from the president, the pope, and the ghost of Elvis. My husband, Forbes, was promoted to regional sales director of the North-Eastern section of the Milky Way, while I…….”

But, hey, as I told Randi, every family has its accomplishments. We’re no exception.

For example, Randi just started her ninth year of home schooling. I don’t know what the kids are learning, but Randi is finally picking up the English, Spelling, and Math she blew off through 17 years of public education. There is a downside to all this. Whenever I open my mouth, I feel like I’m now living with my ninth-grade English teacher, Miss O’Connor, along with my Reading, Logic, and Government teachers, all rolled into one.

Andrew, at 16, is still being home schooled. He is president of his class, as well as top soloist in the choir, and junior class valedictorian. He is the marching band, along with posting a grade point in the top ten percent of the class. He fell one person short of making varsity cheerleader, but I told him there’s always head majorette.

Speaking of head majorette, Andrew likes his hair long and unkempt. I try to be accepting of his self-expression, responding to him like my dad did to me. “You look like a bum. I can’t tell if you’re a boy or a girl.” Finally, Randi, the master psychologist, intervened. She showed Andrew a picture of me in college. Within the hour, he looked like a Marine recruit. I guess he doesn’t mind looking like a girl, but looking like Pop in the 1970’s, that’s over the edge.

Hannah, age 15, is reading Bill Bennett’s *Book of Virtues*, and it’s paying off. Last month, in her Junior Miss Teen Character group, she won the Humility Award. We all were very proud. During her acceptance speech, Hannah said, “I’ve worked very hard to win this award, and I’m pleased you noticed. Humility is something I will strive to make obvious to all who know me.” We’re considering suing Bill Bennett.

Sarah is 13 and unfortunately has developed a verbal tick. Every five words or so, she says “like”. I considered punishing her by fining her a dime for each tick, but I reconsidered. She’s living 24 hours a day with her eighth grade English teacher. That should be punishment enough.

Joanna is also thirteen. We were wondering what, if any, pathological processes could be underlying her episodes of moodiness, weeping, giggling, and sleeping. The endocrinologist gave us the sad news. Joanna’s hormonal levels are comparable to a woman pregnant with octuplets. What’s worse, he diagnosed her with Significantly Neurotic Oppositional Tendencies (S.N.O.T.), a problem he says is common in her age group and gender.

Jon, age thirteen, has no hormonal problem. In fact, we think he has no hormones, and for that matter, no adrenaline, no awareness, no motivation, and no initiative. But he is doing much better in school. Last week he finished a three hundred page book. And even for an eighth-grader, that’s a lot of coloring.

Sam, our fifth grader, is growing up fast. He is much more aware of his physical appearance. For instance, about a third of the time now his fly is close to all the way zipped. He's a walking advertisement for "Dress for a Mess".

James (8), Mary (7), Pete (6), and Liz (4) spend so much time in the corner that Randi and I are running out of available corner space and times. We've taken to handing out slips of paper stating, "Show up next Wednesday, 2:00 AM. You have corner time." To ease corner overcrowding, we're considering developing a half way couch program.

Elizabeth(4) is the youngest, and we're seeking a preschool therapy encounter group setting to deal with Liz's anger management issues and immaturity. She too has been diagnosed: Behavioral Regressive Attitudinal Trauma (B.R.A.T.) Our relatives still accuse us of slack standards with Liz, but we are tightening up. Just last week I informed her there will be no more co-ed slumber parties, and if she thinks she can smoke in the living room, she's got another thing coming. Sometimes, a parent just has to be willing to be the bad guy.

As for Randi and me, we continue to scuffle. Randi refuses to work for a living, while my work schedule has doubled since last year. I now talk for 2 hours a day on the radio instead of one, three days a week - week after week, month after month. Randi doesn't appear to understand the stress I'm under. I try to be understanding, but there has to be a more even division of labor in our home. So we've reached a compromise. In addition to her minimal child raising demands, Randi will take over a few more minor household duties - the yard, the cars, all bill paying, basement and roof repairs, meals for shut-ins, the Christmas party, her and my mother's transportation needs, and teach religion classes at church. I will continue to talk six to eight hours per week, do most Christmas cards, and water the kitchen plants. I realize I am no good to my family if I don't care for myself. Sacrifice has become my resolve for the new year.

Well, that's it for now. Randi will type this and get it off to you all. God's blessings be upon you and your families.

The Guarendi's