

Guarendi Greetings

Dear Family and Friends,

Blessings to all. For those of you offended by getting a wish for blessings, in the interest of openness to all viewpoints, I offer two options. One, please feel free to fantasize that the blessing is from other than God, say from Elvis or the vast unfeeling cosmos. Two, report your blessed distress to the ACLU. Call 1-800-P-R-I-C-K-L-Y.

It's great to experience another Christmas. As my son James (age 11) says, "Dad, like Christmas is so cool and stuff; they ought to make it a yearly event." Another fine product of Guarendi Home Academy.

Randi and I are again getting into our annual Christmas tiff over for whom to buy. Randi says we need to acknowledge anyone who has played a significant role in the kids' upbringing. My comeback is that the list is getting unwieldy— probation officers, judges, defense attorneys, counselors, guards. Finally we compromised. We will buy for only those who have been personally involved with four or more children, for over eight years, and have written letters of recommendation for halfway home commitment. Still, that leaves fourteen people. Oh well, Christmas is the spirit of giving.

Andrew (age 19) is in college. Like my dad did for me, I try to give him philosophy to live by. At his sophomore orientation, I told him and his friends, "Remember, parole officers come and go, but a good therapist can last a lifetime." With typical teen know-it-all tone, he said, "I know, Dad, you've been telling me this since second grade." Exactly my point. Some of those early criminal justice contacts are long gone.

Hannah (age 18) is home from college. She wants to visit some of her out of state college friends over Christmas break. When Randi tried to talk her into staying home, Hannah argued, "But I like my friends." To which Randi replied, "Christmas is not a time to be with people you like. It's a time to be with your family." I wish I could think that quickly on my parenting feet.

We're especially proud of Jon (age 16). It looks like he'll be graduating at the top of his class. He's now 5' 7". All the other sixth graders are 5' 3" and under.

Joanna (16) is looking for part-time work. She was hired at "Attitudes Are Us," but quit after one day. She didn't like a paragraph in the work agreement that stated employment would be immediately terminated if she went insane. When I asked her why that bothered her, she replied, "I'm too old to believe in a sanity clause." Another fine product....

Sarah (16) is learning to drive under my watchful tutelage. I've learned several things during our many father-daughter bonding sessions. 1) The state requires 50 adult supervised driving hours, but my experience is that it's more like 50,000. 2) Curse words not used since college never fully go away. 3) Resolve Upholstery Cleaner can remove urine stains up to seven or eight times. After that, they are permanent. 4) I now more fully relate to my great grandfather's last words before he died, "A truck!"

Sam (age 14) is becoming a man, and as a fellow man, I couldn't be more proud of the way he is maturing. I like to think I'm playing an active role in all this. For example, after our Thanksgiving meal, he burped the alphabet up to "s" without taking a breath. One Christmas ago, he could only go to "g." That has to be some kind of record. And last week, I just about popped by fatherhood buttons when Sam said to his mother for the very first time, "Mom, pull my finger." Randi was embarrassed, and I'll admit I had to choke back some giggles, but the judge thought it was a hoot.

Randi is teaching Introduction to Theology to the little ones, James (11), Mary (10), Peter (9) and Liz (7). I had some reservations, so I tested the kids. "Why did God make mothers?" Pete: "She's the only one who knows where the scotch tape is." Mary: "Think about it. It's the best way to get more people." I tried again. "How did God make mothers?" James: "He used dirt, just like for the rest of us." Liz: "Just like he made me. Only He used bigger parts." Somehow I don't think Randi is getting the depth she had hoped.

Every relative in the immediate universe continues to carp that our discipline standards with Liz (age 7, our favorite, the cutest, the baby) are virtually non-existent. Repeatedly we've answered them, "If Liz ever does anything wrong, we'll discipline her." We also sent letters to everyone stating, "If that's what you think, then buy Christmas gifts to help us with Liz." My mother was first to respond, getting Lizzy a coupon to "Joe's Ink Creations" for tattoo removal. Pay for the first five, and you get the second five free. I told Randi, "I think Liz will look silly with just her left arm clean."

Randi and I have discovered the secret to strengthening our marriage. Two times a week, we go to a nice restaurant, have some good wine, and some warm companionship. I go Tuesdays; she goes Fridays. Through a lot of humble introspection I've realized that I need to be more thoughtful and giving. So I took Randi to a beauty parlor for our Anniversary. We were there three hours, and that was just for the estimate. Randi ordered one of those mudpacks, and I have to admit, she did look great for a couple of days. Then the mud fell off.

Randi says our marriage suffers from communication issues, or something like that. So she made me attend one of those marriage encounter weekends. The lady facilitator started out by saying, "Women have far better verbal skills than men." I said, "Well, duh." Then she gave us an exercise designed to help spouses know each other better. She asked, "Men, do you know the name of your wife's favorite flower?" I watched the other guys squirm as I sensitively patted Randi's hand and said, "It's Pillsbury, isn't it?"

The doctor says I will walk again, but with a limp.

Well, here's hoping your family life is as cohesive and rewarding as ours. God keep you always.

The Guarendis