

## Guarendi Greetings

Dear Family and Friends,

In past letters, I've been accused of insensitivity. To which I say, "I've grown." I've used the "M" word rather recklessly and have since been informed by brilliant legal minds how to more conscientiously convey our wishes. To wit:

"Please accept with no obligation, implied or implicit, our best wishes for an environmentally conscious, socially responsible, low stress, non-addictive, gender neutral, celebration of the winter solstice holiday and subsequent development of various festivals, practiced within the most enjoyable traditions of the religious persuasion of your choice, or secular practices of your choice, with respect for the religious/secular persuasions and/or traditions of others, or their choice not to practice religious or secular traditions at all. By accepting this greeting, you are accepting these terms. This greeting is subject to clarification or withdrawal. It implies no promise by the wisher to actually implement any of the wishes for her/himself or others, and is void where prohibited by law. This wish is warranted to perform as expected within the usual application of good tidings for a period of one year, or until the issuance of subsequent holiday greeting, whichever comes first."

There, now onto the family happenings.

Andrew's years in college are zipping by. He's a junior, and he's maintaining his resolve to cram five years of course work into eight. Preparing for his senior year project in biomedical engineering, he proclaimed, "I want to make a difference forever for world peace." So, he's narrowed his projects down to three: 1) A TV remote control that can send its signal through the heads of people in the way. 2) A multi image computer screen that allows eight video games to be played at once. 3) A hand held device that can mute humans of small stature. It warms my heart to see Andrew's growing level of compassion for his fellow man— rather, persons— that I'm getting for my \$652.00 a day tuition.

Hannah (age nineteen) continues to pursue a military degree, but she failed her marksmanship test four times. It turned out to be not a sight problem but a hearing problem. The headsets Hannah was forced to wear blocked out too much range noise. She couldn't concentrate because of the quiet. So Randi sent her a recording of our family dinner table, and Hannah shot a perfect score. The other cadets complained, though. They said Hannah's recording drowned out the simultaneous fire of 317 M-16's, 27 Howitzers, and 16 Abrams tanks. I told her to tell them and the C.O., "Quit whining, or I'll turn the volume up to normal, and include Liz's voice."

Joanna (17) is a senior getting ready to graduate. Because she's home schooled, she hasn't had the chance to earn the kinds of honors that schooled kids do. So Randi decided to award her with graduating "Magna cum Loudest." Jo needs that kind of recognition, as her and my relationship hasn't been real solid lately. In fact, I haven't spoken to her in about two weeks. I didn't want to interrupt her.

Sarah (age 17) got her first job, at Wendy's. It was a bit of an adjustment for Randi. She had always hoped someday to hear her kids intone, "I'd like to thank the Nobel Academy for this multiple award." Instead, it's "Would you like to super-size that?" I reassured Randi, "Don't worry. I don't think Sarah's going to last too long." Her first week on the drive through window she asked several cars in a row, "Will that be for dining in?" I drove through last week to say "Hi" and give my order, "I'd like a large fry please." Sarah said, "Would you like fries with that?" Maybe we should be grateful is she can just memorize, "Second window, please."

On Thanksgiving Sam, age 15, threatened to run away. Last year that wouldn't have bothered me so much. But this year we put braces on his teeth, and no kid of mine is going to walk out with 3,700 bucks in his mouth. Now I know why my dad panicked when I made the same threats in the eighth grade. If Sam is intent on splitting, he can take the braces off first. We can use them later for James and Pete. Then, if they're still clean, for Liz.

Randi decided to get the whole family in the Christmas spirit early by placing candles all around the kitchen. Her saintly intentions made it about three days. The younger ones, Pete (10) and Mary (11) started using them to light their cigarettes. I hit the ceiling and ordered them, "Use the stove like Liz does." Whereupon know it all Hannah said, "Dad, we have an electric stove." To which James piped up, "Yeah, she should use the microwave." I've always suspected Randi's home schooling has been a little weak in the sciences.

All the kids are bickering more as they get older. And they know how to go straight for the jugular. Jon (age 17) provokes, "My probation officer likes me better than yours does you." Pete retorts, "Yeah, but he's known you years longer." Mary jumps in, "Don't listen to him, Pete. When he was your age he didn't even have one." Then Lizzy (age 8) starts crying, "I don't have one." Sam takes Liz's part, "That's okay, Lizzy. You just haven't been caught yet. Mom is more oblivious as she ages. And Dad needs glasses."

Fortunately, Randi and I are making marriage work. We're moving toward eight happy years together. We've been married for 23. Randi says I've helped her a lot in child rearing. She knew me for eight years prior to having any children, and this prepared her fully to deal with toddlers and preschoolers. To which I respond, "Twinkle, twinkle little star. What you say is what you are. No reverses." She's learning not to mess with a psychologist.

As for me, I still drive myself relentlessly, against my plastic surgeon's orders. He says if I raise my eyebrows in counseling too many more times I'll pull the stitches out of my shin. So now, I'm looking into getting Liz or Hannah to do all my therapy nodding for me. As I get older, I realize the need to better care for me. I only wish Randi would start giving of herself a little more.

Well, God's blessing on you all. And please don't be intimidated by our family's accomplishments. It took us years of effort, and might I say, my professional acumen to get where we are.

Peace,  
The Guarendis