



When the kids are saying they wish one of my sisters was named Arctica so they could have an Aunt Arctica, it's clear that it's time they go outside and get some fresh air. When I hear that and think it would make good fodder for this year's letter, well, it's clear I ain't got much this year. Hell, my proudest moment of the year came just two days after I sent out last year's letter, when Hannah let out a very teenager-ly "Ugh!" during our weekly visit to Skyline Chili. When asked what that was for, she replied in that tone that only a teenager can muster, "Not only is this not a Christmas song, it shouldn't even be a song!" She was, of course, referring to *Baby It's Cold Outside*, which was part of the holiday Muzak we were enjoying. Whaddya know, I've raised a music snob. I couldn't be more proud. My work here is done.

But seriously, I have nothing. In fact, I'll let you in on a little secret - throughout the year I keep notes of those little slice-of-life moments that provide the grist for this annual missive. I opened it up this year and here's what I've got:

"Wifey wants me botoxed."

Not a whole lot to go on there - and not sure I'd want to go there even if there was. So let me see if I can pull anything out from [my apparently aging] memory...

There was the time I came downstairs to find Jefferson juggling two balls in one hand, playing Beethoven's *Ode to Joy* on a recorder with the other, all while hula-hooping. A combined skill set that lost all value the day Ed Sullivan left this world. At least he wasn't playing *Baby It's Cold Outside*.

There was our discussion of whether Steve Jobs might be America's Leonardo Da Vinci. I thought there was a better candidate and left it to the kids to guess who that might be. Hannah's answer? Steven Colbert. Of course, Steven Colbert! Benjamin Franklin, what was I thinking?

Then there was that major milestone when Jefferson excitedly announced he can see over the Ragu. Well, that's it - you can't expect to keep the boy down on the farm after he's seen over the Ragu.

Let's see... Oh, yes! Chris and I got jobs (as a fan of movie lines, I kept waiting for Chris to say, "You'll do no such thing," which is what Dudley Moore's grandmother said when he announced he'd get a job in *Arthur*. Alas, no such line was uttered). So after leaving decades of self-employment behind to join corporate America (Chris with Lexis/Nexis, me with Procter & Gamble - yes, you read that correctly), we went out and bought ourselves gifts. Chris bought artwork, a loveseat, a sofa and carpet. I bought a wood chipper. At least one of us has our priorities straight. And it's not the person who worries about the mud tracked into our newly-carpeted house by the wood chipping dude.

What the wood chipping dude really needs is a new truck. Replaced the catalytic converter (\$1,000) and thought, "Ok, time to sell this thing." But then the transmission went out (\$2,000). Ok, now it's time to sell - but first must replace this noisy muffler. Check that, replace this cracked exhaust manifold (\$1,000). Now sell? Better wait until it cools off so the hit-or-miss A/C isn't such an issue. Now that it's December, A/C's not a problem, but that hot air that only blows out the A/C vents (and into your face) might be. So might the stereo that has no left channel (listen to Buffalo Springfield's *For What It's Worth* on one channel some-time - it's like hearing it for the first time all over again). And then there's the pre-Ben Franklin passenger door - nothing electrical. Window, door lock, mirror—all dead. The funniest thing about this rolling heap is that every time I take it in they put that courtesy paper on the floor. I swear it's the only time they put that stuff down to protect their shoes from the car, rather than the other way around (why carpet-woman's priorities aren't quite straight).

Anyway, paraphrasing another movie line, it's been a helluva year at sea, sir. It began with Hannah recovering from jaw surgery for a benign jaw bone cavity we thought might be much worse, followed by Chris's dad falling and breaking his neck. Fortunately, he is up and about, but now we've learned that Chris's mom is gravely ill and we are trying to enjoy our remaining time with her. And tragically, we lost our nephew Alex in an auto accident late last month, but not before he completed a 2-1/2 month cross-country trip that had been years in the planning. As his dad, Scott, said, it was a bucket list item for Alex that he was so grateful he got a chance to complete. Alex's zest for life, along with the grace with which Chris's mom is facing her future thanks to her faith in God, leaves me with this year's advice and wish...

**Live Well, Live Right**

**Have a blessed Christmas and may you enjoy  
a safe, peaceful and joyous 2012**

Late update: Our first real Christmas tree in 10 years lasted all of 24 hours before falling and spilling water and preservative all over our week-old carpet. Carpet woman is not pleased, but with new artificial tree in transit, wood chipping dude is ready to rock on the old tree, Mulch, anyone? Ya gotta have priorities.