

You Don't Say

Life as we know it: a constant source of wonder

BY KATHY BUCKWORTH

One of the most popular love-to-hate-'em Christmas traditions is the "Dear Friends" holiday letters that make their seemingly innocuous way into my home year after year. Whatever great adventures and accomplishments my family has experienced in the last 12 months, these friendly-fire missiles blast me into the realization that it *just wasn't enough*. And I'm usually reading the details of another family's truly exciting life while the shortbread is burning, the dog is coughing up a Christmas ornament and the kids are fighting over who gets to put the angel on the top of the tree.

I suppose all of us need something to show for our Herculean efforts and these newsletters (OK, thinly disguised brag sheets) offer a fond look back. Plus, producing reams of them is push-button easy. It must be. I get them from everyone, from the real estate agent who sold us our home – 10 years ago – to a high school chum I haven't spoken to since, well, high school.

I've never managed one of my own but I do know what they need to include. It's a must to list every family trip with phrases like "the kids were enthralled" and "well-earned recharging time." (No one ever fesses up to the two-year-old pooping in the hotel bathtub.)

I've also come to learn that complaints, framed properly, are acceptable. "The \$200,000 renovation is really taxing us." Or "If Bobby weren't such a good hockey player, teams wouldn't constantly fight over him." Topped off with, "Add in Joe's big promotion (the bank would close without him), and you can guess how stressed we are!" After stuff like this, I'm longing to read something that will cheer

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me up, such as "Uncle Fred has discovered his feminine side and really is smashing in drag." So, partway through one of these missives, I usually stop to compose a letter of my own.

Dear Friends:
 It is hard to believe that one year could contain all the exciting and unbelievable events that have shaped our evolving lives. Little Linda's unfortunate pinworm incident did take 10 years off my life, but, thankfully, Jessie is still a treasure in the classroom. Her teachers always remark on her cheerfulness. Amazed, we hope she'll go far. (A university in another province would be bliss.) Then there's Ben. He positively shines in senior kindergarten, helped by the "look at me!" gene inherited from his grandfather. We are counting the days until all three leave for a whole summer at camp. We should have the new kitchen sink installed by then, so I'll enjoy hand washing fewer dishes.

The kids are enrolled in sports all over town five nights a week. (Sitting in a frigid arena gives me a chance to catch up on my mending.) Luckily all three make up in enthusiasm what they lack in skill. (They do seem to have their dad's complete lack of physical prowess.)

Charlie and I have both managed (touch wood) to avoid the waves of random layoffs at our workplaces. Thank goodness. Our erstwhile colleagues are having to make such tough decisions about financial advisers and severance packages. And they're so bored, they spend mind-numbing hours on the golf course. Last but not least, Muffin (he really is part of the family) is recovering nicely from his bladder operation. (The diapers look so cute on him!)

Hoping you share with us in this joyful season,

Kathy

The author of *The Secret Life of SuperMom* (Sourcebooks, 2005), Kathy Buckworth apologizes to all who have sent a Christmas letter to her home.