



Christmas 1995

Best wishes for the Holidays and the New Year. Status report: The Bradens are fine. Karen (25) and Sandra (22) remain in Brandon, Florida, outside Tampa. Robert and Anne are still at home here at Fort Eustis, Virginia, south of Williamsburg.

Karen spent most of the year trying to get her Graduate Record Exam (GRE) scores up to get into grad school and taking minor jobs in the meanwhile to keep from starving. She worked for a while at Tampa Bay Academy (for abused/disturbed adolescents) but got the worst of a session with a patient and hobbled for two months. She wove such a pitiful story that her Sunday School class adopted her as an Outreach Program and delivered food to her apartment on a regular basis. But then she called to report being hired by the Salvation Army. "Great," I said, "glad to have another family member in the Army and when do you report to boot camp? Also, when do you get issued your bell and apron?"

"Oh no," she replied, "I'm a case manager and work in an office with a **salary** and **benefits** and all that stuff." So with those magic words, I broke her dinner plate and wished her well. Need to find out if her exalted position lets her relatives into our local store early each day so we can grab up the *real* bargains. And her GRE scores did go up so admission to graduate school is a possibility. (Elizabeth, I'm coming.)

Sandra graduated December 19th from the University of Southern Florida with a degree in Elementary Education and considered finding a teaching position in the area. Naturally, Hillsborough County had just released 300 teachers into the job market, all of whom have priority over Sandra. I advised her to join Karen's Sunday School class. However, latest plan is more schooling: pediatric nursing. Whoever heard of a foot nurse? Sandra and her beau, Steve, celebrated Christmas Eve by getting engaged. Bonnie asked me if I'd seen "Father of the Bride." What's that mean?

Anne (16) surprised us this November when she was elected as a write in candidate to the Newport News City Council. She did her campaigning through the Internet on a platform of political reform and financial restructuring. She graduates this year from Princeton, conducts brain surgery for the indigent during school breaks, and lectures on nuclear engineering at Yale on weekends. Well, not exactly ... though I've been tempted to write such a letter at times. Actually, she is bugging us for a car, as you might expect. She has her learner's permit and is getting some stick time while she takes Drivers Ed. I "suited up" for her first lesson with a neck brace and helmet. Waved at all her friends while en route to a large open area. Nothing better than getting a chance to embarrass your children. She played field hockey this Fall and enjoyed that very much. The part we enjoyed was the fact that the number of teeth before field hockey equalled the number of teeth after field hockey. For those with no such experience, field hockey is 22 girls with sticks running around on a field while parents who don't have the foggiest idea of the rules or strategy cheer like mad.

Robert (13) is at the age between ESPN Sports Center and Beverly Hills 90210. He played Spring baseball and Fall soccer, where yours truly was the team coach in each case. (Only screamed myself hoarse a couple of times.) Baseball All Star. Soccer high

team scorer. Also made the All-City band in clarinet. Yes, this is boring. And now the girls are calling him at home. Between Anne and Robert the phone is in use 100% of the time. Why didn't girls call me when I was his age? Don't answer that. With the girls in Florida, the phone bill last month was over \$80, not including my 900 numbers. Robert is also sneaking stuff from my closet since the current style is to wear clothes ten times too big and pants that are falling off the hips. Think I can still take him for the next year so I'm holding firm on keeping out of my clothes.

Bonnie and I stay active with the various youth programs at Fort Eustis. Have now become President of the installation's Youth Council. Bonnie helps out lots even though she has taken full time employment baking cookies for anyone who'll take them and feeding all the squirrels, rabbits, birds, stray cats and occasional opossum that wander by the house. And, yes, the Bonnie Braden Kraft Korner keeps the house populated with various flavors of string, ribbon, buttons, bells, angel hair, yarn, poster board, and paint.

And having filled up six days each week, that left Sunday for rest. Wrong. The chapel's Youth Fellowship meets Sunday evenings and has about 40 hungry kids each week. We're getting to their hearts through their stomachs with offerings of pizza and fried chicken. I run the warm-up activities each meeting. Interesting dynamics in pulling kids in for activities and games when they all are working on their image and don't want to look too enthused - even if they are. But they keep coming back so our teenager version of Double Dare must be working.

We celebrated Sandra's graduation by a cruise on **The Big Red Boat** to Nassau and the Bahamas. A great time! Bonnie prepared by buying new clothes. I prepared by playing the Blackjack game on the computer and getting advice from "Doctor Blackjack." Made \$250 and proved to Bonnie I am not "ruining my mind on that dumb computer."

I keep filling out these job application forms and getting "bite me" letters back. Can't understand why - I use Spell Check and even Grammatik. I figured it's kind of like the two Marines who retired from Quantico and decided to set up a roadside watermelon stand. They drove to Florida, bought watermelons for 50¢ each, and returned to sell them three-for-a-dollar outside the gate. Business boomed, but they were losing money. So they thought and thought ... and decided to buy a bigger truck!

In my case, I've thought and thought, and decided to build a bigger application package. It's going to have a reference page with all kinds of Jet Set, high rollers who don't know me from Adam; and I'm just hoping that no one will call them to find out they identify with me even less well than the last telemarketer who was selling them undersea cemetery plots (never need watering). So what I really need from any of you is the address of Donald Trump; I'm sure that he is a close personal friend of someone on my list, and that he would not notice one more person trying to parlay his name into some type of opportunity. Say hi to Marla for us, if you see her.

Basis for this effort is that the Bradens will leave the service next Summer. Want to get Anne settled for her last two years of high school. Expect next year's letter to have a return address from a double-wide in a low-rent trailer park.

Warmest regards ---

Jay, Bonnie, Karen, Sandra, Anne and Robert