

4 Dec 91

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Dear « 1 »,

Have just re-read last years letter - and had to check the date to make sure it was only one year ago. It seems like at least two! So here goes, to tell the tale.

John may be getting closer to a career choice - fireman. He has quite a bit of information on what it takes, and what it gives. Still it will be a long time yet until he is old enough to be accepted, so we will wait and see. In the mean time he is working harder than we have known him at school. As he says, he can do it, but anyone who volunteers for four years of that stuff at University must be looney, or have a very specific goal in mind. Well, thats his view, and he is entitled to it.

John did Summer work at Lancing again, but things were slack, so he had to go to another branch - Erin Mills. This took him about 40 mins each way on the scooter. He also spent a lot of time working on the car this Summer. (Sound familiar?) He fixed up oil leaks, repaired the windscreen wipers, and did a lot of body work. Of course there was also a lot of work on the car hi-fi. I think the body work has been necessary because the power of the hi-fi loosened all the joints and rust!

As a result of all the work, his car is still soldiering along, but the expense has made it seem less desireable than before he had it, so it became a possible sale item. For example, his insurance (third part only) cost is \$3,000 a year. During the warmer weather he switched over to the scooter, but now that winter is here, the equation seems more complicated again.

One big change since I wrote last is that Wendy has given fiancé Dave the loving heave ho - much to Sue's and Dave's distress. Apparently he was too serious and Wendy say's "I'm just a kid, I should have fun." Wendy now has a new Dave, from Price Club, where she worked until she moved on to University.

Wendy got so bound up with getting ready for living away from home, that going to University became almost incidental. Finding the rent, getting towels, sheets, bed, chair(s), etc. dominated much of her serious thinking in August. However one 'academic' item has had attention. She knew she would have to do a lot of writing. These days that usually means a computer with a word processing program. Wendy felt it would need too much experience to keep the computer going, so she got a dedicated word processor. Essentially this is an ordinary electric typewriter with a computer and screen added on.

Wendy seems to have settled down to life at University. She is sharing the rent of a house with three other students. They seem to be keeping the place in fairly good order. Her academic work is going OK, though she will never find it easy. Her choice of subjects is fairly general now, to retain flexibility of choice next year. Emphasis is on English. She has a part time job at the Price Club at Waterloo. This helps to make ends meet. She was pleased recently to be made up to supervisor. This is what she was here, but part timers are not normally given that position.

Sue and I had a lovely trip up to the Rideau valley for Easter. This is just south of Ottawa, and about 400 Km north of Oakville. Very nice, very quiet, very peaceful. Somewhat spoiled by Sue coming down with Flue. We stayed in a lovely old country Inn, on a quiet lake side. They fed us lovely large fattening breakfasts with Maple syrup everywhere (well nearly). That area is the Maple syrup capital of Canada. We brought a gallon back, it cost us \$40.

It was still cold up there then - one day was quite bitter. Large areas of many lakes were still frozen. There was a dog wandering around on one patch of ice that extended to the shoreline. However the people who had been advised that they could drive a pickup on the ice the week before had been misinformed. Fortunately they got no distance at all before they broke through, so they were towed out again without much damage. We went up to Ottawa, parts of the capital are very pretty, particularly by the large river. There were ice flows drifting down with the current.

Oh yes, we have swapped in the old waggon (and some cash) for a new car, and Sue has bought a new computer. Both very posh. Perhaps when Sue has tamed her (user friendly) monster, she will write to you on it. We avoided being a four computer family by the skin of our teeth, the 'old original' had been declining for some time now, and finally became unusable just before Sue bought hers.

The car is doing nicely so far, better than 40 mpg, instead of around 20 mpg from the old waggon. It is a Toyota "Corrola SR5" - a blue Coupé. We have been very disenchanted by the unreliability of the American cars we bought when we arrived. Incidentally, the Corrola is the same model that Wendy has (just 10 years younger).

I tried to make this Summer one of garden improvement, though I still do not know anything about it. I have replaced some of our sand with peat, and put technical fertiliser stuff on the lawn. I suspect we had some sort of bug in the back 'lawn' though. Spraying it with bug killer, and adding seed and fertiliser seem to have wrought some improvement.

Have done still more tree lopping this Autumn, on the acia tree this time. Had to take most of the top wood off. Two branches broke in heavy winds. One of them broke another in falling. I had to take one more out to fell the broken parts safely. All this left a very bedragled and lopsided tree, so we decided to cut the rest back even, and hope for the best. I hope that some of the tree cutting we have done will bear fruit (Sue says "Did you mean that to be a joke?") in the form of more grass. The theory is that there will be more sun and water on the grass.

However I suspect the greatest change is due to raising the mower blades. When the grass does grow here, it really grows. One to one and a half inches in a week is normal spring growth. Since you are only supposed to cut the top third off, that means you have to set your mower at three inches up! Aparently 2.5" to 3" is normal. We had ours set at a more English 1.5".

The big bulk jobs on the house are now done, and a start has been made on the slightly smaller scale. We have put in a new kitchen floor, lights, and fresh paint. Have made a start on the lounge paintwork.

Have just read through my last to you, to see what else has changed. Only one thing that seems newsworthy comes to mind, and I will save that till later!

Having been at Pratt's for more than five years, I have now risen to the dizzy heights of four weeks holiday! My job is still hectic, but no worse.

The recession is officially over here, but even officially things are still "very slow." I hear that whilst house starts are up, they are still only a small fraction of previous peak. Bankruptcies are still running at record rates. Interest rates have been falling for several months now, but still around 10%.

The 'book' is complete and I have printed it up and got 10 copies made. These have been loaned to anyone that thinks they can make useful comment. Once I have comments in and if it still seems worth try for publishing, I will have another go.

Sues job at Spar Aerospace continues to be uncertain, and hence taxing. This is just a reflection of where the project is at. Still it certainly seems very clear that she was right to get out of Litton when she did. Litton's were the prime contractor, ie. they subcontracted a lot of the work out, but were responsible for the overall programme. Because of their poor performance, they have now been stripped of that position, and a Government office has taken on the role of prime.

Litton's still have to deliver the things they were going to make themselves, but this is a lot less work - and prestige. There have been further redundancies, around a third of those left working on the programme. It now seems likely that within a few years Litton will pull out of Canada all together. Quite a number of Litton people are now trying to get into Spar. Some have succeeded, but many have not.

One of our year's highlights was a visit from some friends from Oakville, Joan and Les Crossman. They were on a six week trans America trip, staying with their many friends and relatives. We went to the theatre at Stratford - thats about 80 miles west of here, close to Waterloo, and not far from London.

We had our best - and most expensive - canadian meal there. Another day we made another visit to Niagra, for the first time going on the boat that goes right into the spray from the falls. Sue has wanted to do that for a long time.

When they got back to England, they sent us a lovely lot of pictures, we hadnt realised the place was so pretty!

Well that seems to be all for now so I will bye bye and lots of love . . . Oh come to think of it, I promised you a "later." We have bought a boat.

Sue & Peter Matthews.