

Greetings family and friends,

Again, we are all blessed to see another Christmas season – and another of my letters. At 11 ½ years old, I feel as though I have really hit my prime. Though my doctor says I have “outperformed expectations” for a St. Bernard and Mom frets about the inevitable, Dad fears I will be writing these letters forever. To be honest, if this family doesn’t start paying more attention to me, I will forget all about the letters and start writing an advice column for lonely housepets. Regardless, I hope that the season finds you in joyful spirits. As always, I would love to share with you a sampling of the Maguires’ adventures over the past year.

As long as we are talking dogs, I should point out that there have been a few changes in the four-legged branches of this family tree. Sadly, Lenny crossed the Rainbow Bridge in June. As much as I loved to tease him, we do all miss him. He was a great partner for Dad, an awesome guardian at the house, and way cooler than the new guy. Furry Murray retired from police work in July and has taken up a full-time position as World’s Most Annoying Dog. In April, we temporarily added a NEW dog to the house. Bolt was auditioning for a spot with Dad’s “Take Your Mutt to Work” program. After less than a week he, quite literally, bit the hand that feeds him. When Mom found out, she quite literally voted him off the island. Last we heard, Bolt lives in Ohio now. That’s worse than just taking him out behind the shed. As far as dad’s gig goes, he finally gave up the lint-roller and is out of the K9 business. He took a “promotion” in July and now is a sergeant. I have yet to get an answer as to what he actually does, but I know that a lot of it involves a desk. And he doesn’t have to do police work anymore. While he isn’t always convinced he made the right decision, he has worked days for the last 4 months. First time in 15 years. All I know is that he has decided to get “back in shape”. He runs every day and I get walked almost every day. Yay desks!

Now Mom. There is a career that seems to be on fire. While she is still teaching AP English and some other boring classes, she has taken on more roles outside of the classroom. She has begun blogging for Oakland Schools and has even got her own domain name and website. I will not give her the satisfaction of mentioning it here, though. She now Twitters on the regular and has even been heard referring to her “online presence”. I feel that Twitter is about as useful as a Belgian Malinois, but what do I know? What’s really cool is that she got to address the State Board of Education this fall to tell them about her work. No state boards have ever called to ask me my opinion on things, but if they did I would have a lot to tell them. Maybe I can be an advisor to Donald Trump.

Last winter was a blast. I was told that my St. Bernard status makes me biased, but it was awesome. There was snow for months on end and I think we went a whole month without the temperature ever getting above 5 degrees. If you ask me, it could stay like that all year. Unfortunately, the wonderful weather was punctuated by a slew of snow days for Mom and the kids. It is really hard to enjoy a relaxing day in the arctic wonderland when the whole family is running around making snowmen, going sledding, building forts and then complaining about being wet and cold. I guess you could say we all enjoyed last winter in our own ways. In January, everybody went up to the Tackebury cabin in Gladwin for a ski weekend. Mom, Dad, and Charlie skied while Molly got to spend the day with Grandma and Grandpa T. I enjoyed a quiet winter weekend at home. While many folks consider March to be spring, it was still quite winter-like. So Charlie and Molly had a combined birthday party at the roller rink. Molly is now three and Chuck is six. Everybody was amazed at how fast they both grow and how old they are. Dad was amazed that roller rinks still exist.

Spring eventually reared its ugly head, but the blow was softened by celebrations with grandparents. In April Grandma T celebrated her birthday by having a nice golf outing in town here with some relatives. I'm not supposed to tell you that it was her 70<sup>th</sup> birthday, so let's just keep that between us. Grandma won the family golf tournament but Dad got to use the most golf balls. Mom tried to drive a golf cart but luckily cooler heads prevailed. Spring also brought the opening of the giant mystery box which spent the winter in our garage. Grandpa M came over in May and unveiled his late 1960's model Vespa. Complete with sidecar, the like-new scooter was soon fired up and giving rides to the whole family. Well almost. I was told I would get a ride when Grandpa finds a helmet that fits me. I know he's good for it. Anyhow, Grandpa M spent much of the summer tooling around on his Vespa and giving Chuck and Molo rides.

Also in March, Mom got to do her first science fair project. Charlie helped. It was on solar power and how one could harness the power of the sun to cook...say... a marshmallow. I've never raved about eating dry kibble for 11 ½ years, but if I had to wait for my meal to be cooked by the sun every day, I would be very hungry. And angry. Ok, Angrier. The project was cool in the end and I think they both had fun. Over the winter, Molly did her own science project entitled "Snot: How Many Germs Can I Bring Home?". It was equally inconclusive and there was never a sanctioned fair for her to show off her work.

Once the snow finally melted for real, summer was in full swing. I beat the heat by drooling and panting as loud as I could. I've really outdone myself. I can drown out Wheel of Fortune just by BREATHING. The rest of the family set off enjoying lots of camping and summer fun. Once again, there were trips with the Zieglers and Maguires. They swam in 8 foot waves in Lake Michigan, hiked the foothills of Grass Lake, and enjoyed a fall Halloween weekend. Mom and the kids even passed on the camper and slept in a tent for the week with the Tackebury family. I am told that this camping thing is really a hoot. Lots of swimming, cooking, fires, s'mores, family fun. I wouldn't know. I went once years ago. It rained. Instead I enjoyed some relaxing time at home with some of my favorite dog sitters. I used the quiet time to relax in the air conditioning and find myself. Also, Charlie resumed his baseball career. When he wasn't kicking at stones in the outfield or making armpit-fart noises on the bench, he actually learned quite a bit and hit the ball well. Summer was capped off by the annual Badminton Invitational which is really just an excuse for lots of people to wander around our yard while Grandpa M feeds me endless snacks. It is the best day of the year.

September brought back some normalcy. Mom and the kids were back to school. Dad was pretending to work on a list of things around the house when he wasn't at work. I slept a lot. Charlie is in first grade and has homework now. I'm told that it's so sweet to hear him reading books to his sister. Luckily I'm mostly deaf now so I wouldn't know. Molly is in Pre-K. When not throwing a temper tantrum about Dad trying to style her hair, she is chattering away about anything and everything. She makes up for Charlie's quietness by being the most talkative three year old ever. Luckily, I'm mostly deaf. Mom is hard at work 'shaping young minds' while Dad is back to sergeanteeing. Nobody knows what he does. Mom finally figured out to stop asking "how was your day". He has talked of going back to school this winter to get a master's. I don't think he even has a plan. He's just tired of Mom being more educated.

Speaking of school, this letter has again turned into a dissertation. If you made it this far, I thank (and commend) you. The Maguires are truly thankful for all of the blessings in their lives. We are happy to enjoy this wonderful holiday season with family and friends and we wish you all a Merry Christmas.

-Beaumont, Hattie, Patrick, Molly and Charlie. (and maybe Furry Murray)