December 2011 or thereabouts

What’s up?

Fifteen years ago, I had a dream. I had a dream that I could be funny, not just for a line or a paragraph, but for a WHOLE PAGE, and not just now-and-then but ONCE A YEAR. I had a dream that I could use words like “pee” and “poop” in a holiday letter and get it past my editorial staff. I had a dream that I could brag about my awesome family in such a way as to not be “one of those guys” who brags excessively about his family. Fifteen years later, I’m still dreaming, but now it’s because I can’t stay awake for anything, including red lights. In the spirit of plagiarism, I decided to just copy/paste highlights from our previous letters, so I proudly present “Fifteen Year of Great Stuff” cleverly interspersed with poignant vignettes about our family from the past year. Most of it is not made up.

1997: Our Annual Holiday Letter never would’ve gotten off the ground without the contributions of Oso, our first border collie. He was a fixture of our letters from his 1997 debut until he met his tragic demise in the 2008 letter. Well not IN the letter, but you know what I mean. Since 2009, Lolly the emergency backup border collie has manned (dogged?) the helm, protecting us from backyard squirrels and barking comedically, 24/7. Oso would be proud.

1998: Do you remember back when Erin broke her arm when she fell off a Hippity Hop? Me neither, so it’s a good thing I wrote it down in the 1999 holiday letter, since the stuff I do write down will be my only lasting memory of these years. (Yes, I know, this is the 1998 paragraph, but I already have something for 1999 so I’ll move this bit up to 1998. Erin will approve of this coming early, since she is 15 minutes early for everything).

1999: Back when Mal was 5, words like “poop” and “underwear” were the funniest words EVER. Let’s just hope that a juvenile sense of humor doesn’t lead him where it often does: teaching math, working in IT, and writing juvenile annual holiday letters. One place we know it WILL lead him is UW-Madison. Yes, Malachy will be a Badger next year. Which is odd, if you recall the 2000-2006 editions of our letter, since he always kind of struck us as a Lizard guy.

2000: This was the year of our pay-per-chuckle letter format, also the year Kathleen started staying home full-time with the kids. Over the years she had her share of laughs, but with Rory nearly a teenager (or he may be one by the time you read this, depending on when I mail it), she has started working again in various capacities, currently as the homebound tutor for the high school. Yuk yuk.

2001: This is the year that Erin started playing the recorder, a small wooden instrument that turns your breath into spit. She is still playing, and along the way has picked up piano, guitar, bass, sax, and the zixik, an Abyssinian nose flute. OK, I did make the last one up.

2002: Rory decided to be a cassowary for Halloween 2002. Cassowaries are large, flightless birds from Australia. Most people don’t realize that cassowaries occasionally wear winter caps with large wads of duct tape on top, which either simulates an actual cassowary horn or signifies that your parents are pathetic at making Halloween costumes. Since Rory is off to high school next year, this was his last official Halloween for wearing wads of duct tape on his head.

2003: We moved into our new house. Then in 2004 we made it big enough to hold us all. It’s still holding…

2004: Back then Rory! signed his name! with exclamation points!!! How eerie that way back in 2004 I would inadvertently sum up Rory! for all time. Over the past few years, he has played Peter Pan!, Cosmo Brown!!, and Sky Masterson!!! on stage, usually winding up with a role that involves lots of singing, dancing, and even kissing girls(!!).

2005: Nigerien birth names were all the rage this year, at least in Imal’s household. Not sure if I mentioned it before, but Imal, Katie, Agali, and Adani, all share the same last name now: Cheesehead. Just kidding—it’s Katie’s last name, Pedriana. For now. I think they rotate, sesqui-annually. It’s great having them in Milwaukee even if it does mean Agali and Adani will grow up Brewers/Packers fans. We love them anyway!

2006: People ask why I haven’t yet reprised the Mad Lib letter format of 2006. I could say it’s because work keeps me too busy (I still do IT stuff, but now for a Dutch trading firm in Chicago called IMC). The truth? I’m just lazy.

2007: Erin’s best quote this year was “If I had a dollar for every time I didn’t explode, I’d be rich!” Erin still hasn’t exploded, but with cross country, soccer, music, and her schoolwork to keep her busy, it might only be because she doesn’t have time to.

2008: This is the year Rory’s cat Simone came down with anterior uveitis (Latin for “around $600”). We faced the prospect of buying our cat glasses but fortunately the drops worked and she went back to just being grumpy and trying to sleep on our heads.

2009: Malachy learned to drive in 2009 WATCH THAT CAR SLOW DOWN MERGE MERGE MERGE!!!! He may be driving slower, but he’s running faster all the time, qualifying for two national championship cross country meets in Portland and San Diego back in December.

2010: My favorite stanza in last year’s poem rhymed “poofy” with “goofy” to describe Erin’s cat Bramlet. Bramlet is still both.

2011: I wanted to include a clever self-referential Inception-like comment here (“Greg finally sat down to type up the 2011 letter: “What’s up?” he typed“”, etc) but the punctuation gave me headaches, plus it’s already 2012. Suffice to say the 2011 was awesome and we are psyched for 2012. We hope you are, too.

Greg!, Kathleen!, Malachy!, Erin!, and Rory!!!!!!!!!!!