

Greetings and Holiday Salutations,

Hey there, hi there, ho there (or should it just be Ho, Ho, Ho just like John McClane in Die Hard said?) with me here and you there (again why would I be sending you a letter if I was sitting there across from you? Come to think of it, why would I be sending you a letter if you were sitting next to me either? It is something interesting to consider and maybe we will have to explore that later in this letter, time permitting, of course, since we are on a tight schedule.)

I am beyond pleased and delighted (almost to the point of being giddy) to be able to bring you, once again, for the fourth consecutive year, the best holiday letter you will ever receive! With this letter, not only will you be able to find out the wonderful things I have done this past year but also be able to see into the deep recesses of my conscious and subconscious mind to obtain insights into some of the great social issues of today and yesteryear.

In past years, we've had intense debates like: is a hot dog a sandwich, which as we know is a not sandwich and is also not a pita, taco or wrap either. It is a self-contained meal or snack (as part of your holiday celebrations, please debate and report back all results to me on Twitter.) and I will not deviate from that stance. In addition, putting ketchup (not catsup) on the hot dog self-contained meal is perfectly acceptable. No debate is necessary for this part of my statement. I have received approval from both Ziggy and Goose that they would be very happy accepting hot dogs with ketchup as a meal or snack.

Now let's have a frank discussion (no reference to hot dogs intended) about macaroni and cheese. I am a great connoisseur of the creamy and delectable meal of macaroni and cheese (for all future references in this letter, we will refer to it as mac 'n cheese) and in the many forms it is available in. Let's review them:

- Kraft Macaroni and Cheese: Probably the most well-known of the mac 'n cheese options, this is a meal in a box. It comes with the pasta and cheese powder. All you need to do is cook the pasta, strain it, mix in butter and add milk and the cheese powder. While this does make a solid meal, I feel not using the pasta provided and utilizing Barilla large shells pasta is the best way to go. This allows the cheese sauce gets caught into the shells and adds to the flavor. Even more flavor if you use two of the cheese powder packets. That may be a bit indulgent but that makes life all the more exciting.
- Annie's Macaroni and Cheese: This is the sibling to the Kraft Macaroni and Cheese. It is very similar and still good but in this man's opinion, is not quite up to the flavor rush of the Kraft version.
- Velveeta Macaroni and Cheese: This mac 'n cheese is similar to the Kraft version except the cheese sauce is already mixed and in a silver packet that you cut an edge off of and then squeeze into the prepared pasta. The cheese sauce is not impressive and unless you mix it in immediately after straining the pasta, it will not mix in

easily. Please take it from me to make sure to have the packet cut and ready before you strain the pasta to ensure the proper mixing.

- **Panera Macaroni and Cheese:** The first time I tried Panera's mac 'n cheese, I really enjoyed it. I was under the impression that they cooked the pasta in the store and mixed in a cheese sauce from the corporate supplier (similar to the Velveta boxed version). That is ok and acceptable. The next time I ordered it, I saw that the mixture of pasta and cheese sauce was shipped to the store in a plastic bag and then warmed. Very disappointing. But doesn't mean I won't buy it again.
- **Baked Restaurant Macaroni and Cheese:** I once went to a restaurant in the Midwest called Baked. They served a mac 'n cheese in a bowl made out of sourdough bread. That is living the high life. A great serving of mac 'n cheese and bread at the same time (more about bread in an upcoming paragraph).
- **Mac 'n Cheese from Steakhouses:** In this noble man's opinion, some of the best mac 'n cheese can be found as side dishes at steakhouses. I do not know how they do it but they are some of the most delectable mac 'n cheeses around. Whether they come with bacon or just regular, you can serve a steakhouse version to me any day of the week and I will happily eat it.
- **Mac 'N Out Restaurant:** A mac 'n cheese restaurant in my town! How could a man be so lucky? Their mac 'n cheese makes for a solid meal but I do not need all the variations like pizza or hot dog mac 'n cheese. Just give me the plain, basic and I am a delighted man.

- **Homemade Mac 'n Cheese:** Now I come, my friends, to the crème de la crème. There is no cheesy pasta that makes this man smile more than making my own mac 'n cheese. Now to start, I utilize a variety of types of pasta based on my mood. If I'm needing comfort food, I will make my mac 'n cheese with elbow pasta; needing a challenge with dining, cavatelli pasta; needing a surprise to how much cheese will mix in to the pasta, large shells (you will remember that I often utilize large shells with my Kraft Macaroni and Cheese.) While the pasta is very important, just as important is the cheese selection in making the pasta. I prefer to use a very sharp orange Cheddar (or as they call it in the grocery stores "yellow" which I have no clue why they do this since it is clearly orange and not yellow. I don't know what kind of bias the grocery stores and cheese industry have against the word orange. And yes, Cheddar should be capitalized) along with a white (usually more cream colored) Cheddar. I cut it into small, bite-sized pieces and mix it into the freshly cooked pasta and then mix in some shredded cheese blend as well. I cover it with breadcrumbs and then pour heavy cream over it. Bake this delightful blend of pasta and cheese for 45 minutes at 350 degrees and I'm in for a flavor rush!

I feel very strongly that I should encourage all of you to take caution in eating any mac 'n cheese to ensure that the temperature is not too hot as to burn your mouth. In addition, please ensure that you have a substantial bread or garlic bread anytime you indulge in mac 'n cheese (Ziggy and Goose encourage you to make extra to share with them...but not too much as Ziggy is on a diet!).

As many of you know, I subscribed a number of years ago for an AARP membership when I became eligible for inclusion in this prestigious group. When I signed up, I had the option of signing up for a one-year, three-year or five-year membership. I figured the one-year would be good if I wanted to try out the waters, the three-year would be if I thought I would make it that long and the five-year is that I am "all-in" and ready to live life to the fullest. I chose the five-year plan and am so thrilled to report that I am at just about the four-year mark of the subscription. With me coming up on that anniversary, AARP offered me a special rate if I re-upped my subscription for another five years after my fifth year in 2026. I said "yes" because I am banking on myself for many more years to come. I must do that so that I can continue to regale you each year with my feats of daring and excitement!

At this point in the letter, it is probably the best time to bring up the most invasive species to ever attack me and my apartment...the gremlin that sometimes domiciles in my apartment, also known as my daughter, as the gremlin often points out to me that I am as she refers to me, an "oldie". This could happen when she sees the grey hairs in my beard, when I have a hard time thinking of a word or when I point out something I liked in my younger days. While she may to all appearances be a sweet and loving child, if you saw the other side to this devilish little demon, you would ask yourself what has the incredible writer of this letter done to deserve this? Whether it be turning all the items in my cabinets to be facing the wrong way, leaving me notes that the garlic powder is the mightiest of the spices (which we all know is garlic salt) or teasing me for my age, she is a force of nature. I can't wait to see what energy or mayhem she brings

to being a Spartan, Cyclone (fitting for her since she is a little tornado every time she is at the apartment), Mustang, Blue Hen, Boilermaker or a member of the Big Red when she goes off to an institute of higher learning next year for entomology.

I will now put forth a new debate that you can also discuss at your holiday celebrations. The debate is if blinking lights on a Christmas tree are a sign that the devil is present in your home. Back around 1980, give or take a couple of years, there was a priest at the local church that made this statement as a part of his Christmas homily. My grandmother was taken back by this as she had blinking lights on her Christmas tree at that point in time. She was very worried about the presence of the devil in her home. There were, however, no appearances or apparitions that ever appeared in her home to my knowledge.

As many I often spend time to make sure that the items being given away for free in my community are of the highest quality standards. I utilize free telephone applications (charges may apply on rotary phones) like "Freebie Alert". These were a few things of note from this year:

- A Little Taste of Autumn = someone was offering free, authentic autumn leaves to decorate your yard to let the spirit of the season continue. Very clever trick to try and get free leaf removal. Better luck next fall.
- Frank the Rooster = the offer of a free rooster named Frank that would be delivered anywhere within a 60 mile radius. I don't know what this rooster did that the owner was willing to part with him, but it must have been something significant.

- DVDs and Old Style DVDs = the picture in the ad shows a rack of DVDs and VHS tapes which I would venture to guess were old style DVDs that were being offered. All of the "old style DVDs" were the recordable type of VHS tapes, so who knows what was on them! Buyer (or in this case receiver of free VHS tapes) beware.
- Old Dirty Couch = the description read: "Take it. I don't want this garbage in my house anymore. It's not broken, just old and used up. Use it for riots, music videos, pranks. I don't care, just get it out of my house! It's plenty big and I'm 6'1", so there you go." I, normally a man of many words, have no words for this.
- Two Bags of Glitter = the listing says it was available 19.6 miles from my apartment. That amount of glitter, heck, any amount of glitter down to one speck needs to stay 20 miles or more away from me at any time. The gremlin disagrees with this statement.

Now it's time for me to share my plans for the upcoming year:

- Watching the gremlin in my apartment mess with my organization until she leaves for an institute for higher education. She may learn at that point in time that organization is delightful.
- Spreadsheets! Spreadsheets! Spreadsheets!
- Throwing penalty flags on my delightful gremlin as she violates protocols.
- Understand what Popular Mechanics said earlier in the year to "Let Us Now Praise the Pipe Wrench".
- Writing another great letter to you next year!

I know this will be sad for you, but it is time to wrap up this letter (I did note that we were on a time limit). But before I close it out, I want to share with you a returning feature for this year's print-out, an accompanying video about Christmas trees. In this video, available on or after December 18, 2024, Santa Griff-Griff (a/k/a Griffin the Giraffe) takes you on a tour of people's homes in the 50s, 60s and 70s. Use your telephone (again, rotary charges may apply) to search on YouTube for "Santa Griff and His Third Annual Christmas Tree Show".

Wishing you love and happiness in 2025 and beyond!

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Any statistics in this print-out come from the tracking spreadsheets I maintain on my personal Google Sheets account. I certify that all of the data and information contained on my personal Google Sheets accounts is, to the best of my ability and knowledge, accurate as data is loaded to the spreadsheets on a daily basis.

Additional Legal Note: The gremlin proofread this letter to ensure that all references to spores, mold, fungus and invasive species are accurately represented; no bacteria or viruses were harmed in the making of this letter. Please note the gremlin is continuing to encourage you to squash any spotted lantern fly spotted in the wild.