



Newsletter for King's Thorn, The Birches & Aconbury

A newsletter for the villages of King's Thorn, Little Birch, Much Birch & Aconbury November 2012- First published 1977

Diary Dates

October

30th Flicks in the Sticks MBCH
31st Garden Photography LBVH

November

3rd Book Exchange LBVH
13th Whist Drive LBVH
14th Flicks in the Sticks MBCH
14th A year in the life of a dairy farmer LBVH
17th Flicks in the Sticks MBCH
20th WI AGM MBCH

November

23rd Village Market MBCH
23rd & 24th Down Memory Lane MBCH
23rd Clothes Sale MBCH
28th Gardening Club LBVH
30th Antiques Valuation MBCH

December

5th. GardeningCub Xmas Social LBVH
6th Xmas Bingo LBVH
31st. New Year's Eve Party LBVH



ANTIQUES VALUATION EVENING

**Friday 30th November at 7pm
Much Birch Community Hall**

Aubrey Dawson (Antiques Valuer for TV programmes such as 'Dickinson's Real Deal', 'Secret Dealers', 'Cash in the Attic' and 'Flog it!') will value your items and then give a talk.

Refreshments will be served from 7.30pm

Tickets: £8.50 to include Refreshments and valuation of one item (additional items £1 each)

(In aid of Much Birch Church)

December Newsletter

Please send copy for December Newsletter to birchesnewsletter@gmail.com or written contributions to John Bryant at Bramley Bungalow, Aconbury Close by the 18th. November

A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF A DAIRY FARMER

Wednesday 14th November at 7.30pm
Little Birch Village Hall

An illustrated talk by Sue and Bob Mason
of Merrivale Farm
Entrance £3.50 including supper



Safety Concerns from Readers

Motorists have asked that pedestrians take extra care now that we are back to dark mornings and evenings again. There have already been several "near misses" especially on Barrack Hill. Please wear clothing so that you can be easily seen

Concern has also been expressed recently for the unsociable behaviour of some horse riders in 'CHURNING UP' the grass verges outside of some properties which have been kept neat and tidy by the owners. This obviously has not been done deliberately but without thought for other people and so we ask for some thought for others as you enjoy your riding.

The same sentiment can also be expressed about some householders who do not trim their roadside hedges, the outward growth of which forces large goods vehicles to the other side and leads to serious breakdown of the metalled surface and to the formation of potholes. Your cooperation in these matters will be much appreciated.

Little Birch & King's Thorn history Group Herefordshire Railways Talk

It was pleasing to see such a good number of people at the talk given by Gareth Davies about Herefordshire's old railways. Gareth kept us much amused as he packed in the facts about the development of the railways, the types of engines used and the stations. He told us of the way that, rather belatedly, several rail companies fought over access to Hereford in the early years of rail, vying for various north-south and east-west routes. Amazingly, Brunel had plans for a main line from London via Roos-on-Wye, Hereford, Kington and on to the Welsh coast at Aberdovey, which was to be a transatlantic port. It was too expensive! Gareth was obviously a great fan of all the old branch lines where time meant nothing and there was always time for a cup of tea. Despite their charm, they were unprofitable some closed early on and the rest Beechinged. His photos illustrated the branch lines beautifully and also how busy the junction stations were. Many of us came away much enlightened about railway history and all greatly enjoyed listening to such an excellent speaker.

Police Briefing – Local Interest Hoarwithy

Sometime during the morning of Friday 5th October, a barn in a field in Lasketts Lane was broken into, and 120 hay bales, an unknown number of straw bales and 100 scaffolding planks were stolen. The offenders drove over a metal field gate to gain access to the field, then

forced the padlock off the door of the barn from where the property was stolen. This is at least the third time that this property has been targeted.

Incident ref 240-s-051012

Madley

A wing mirror on a Vauxhall vectra was damaged whilst it was parked on a driveway in Archenfield between 15.30 on Wednesday 3rd and 8.30am on Thursday 4th October. The owner of the vehicle has asked around the neighbours, who have told her that their vehicles had been damaged over the past few days with aerials being taken off.

Incident ref 117-s-041012

A property on an isolated farm that is being renovated was broken into overnight on Thursday 11th/Friday 12th October. This report has only just come in so no details of property stolen are available at this time.

Incident ref 74-s-121012

About 600 gallons of red diesel, a battery charger and an extension lead were stolen overnight on Thursday 4th/Friday 5th October from an isolated farm. The diesel was taken from a tank and transported in a large quantity of bright yellow containers with 'JCB' written on them - let us know if you see any of these discarded in a hedge or field somewhere.

Incident ref 94-s-051012

At 2.30am on Sunday 7th October, a white Peugeot partner car-derived van R6*5JJO was seen pulling out of a farm gateway, two lurchers were seen in the rear of the vehicle so it is assumed the occupants were lamping or poaching. Enquiries are ongoing with the registered keeper of the vehicle.

Incident ref 95-s-071012

Neighbourhood Watch

This message has been sent from Adrian Symonds, our force NW co-ordinator. Those of you on the Ringmaster System will have had this message, and hopefully re-registered by now. The rest of you might like to sign up for this too, you can choose which of the updates you wish to receive when you click the link. You will still receive this local briefing without having to do anything.

'We have also just introduced a new Neighbourhood Watch message system within the Force that will require existing members to re-register themselves via the Force website. This replaces the five old Ringmaster systems used up until now across the Force (one system for each area) with a single system.

The new system will allow people to register themselves via the Force website to receive Neighbourhood Watch, Rural Watch and Post Office Watch messages. It is also required that existing people registered on the old Ringmaster systems also re-register themselves, as there is no way to transfer contacts from Ringmaster to the new system, so I have circulated a message to all existing members on Ringmaster requesting they do so.

To register for "Neighbourhood Watch", "Rural Watch" (i.e. farm/equine crime) and "Post Office Watch" messages people should:

- 1) Visit the "Register To Receive Watch Messages" page of the West Mercia Police website:
<http://www.westmercia.police.uk/register-to-receive-watch-messages.html>
- 2) Then;
 - a) enter your details,
 - b) tick the mailing list(s) that are relevant to you and
 - c) click "subscribe"
- 3) Once you have subscribed as above, you will receive an email - please go into that email and it will ask you to click a link to confirm you have subscribed, once you have clicked that, then you have fully subscribed to receive messages.'

Halloween Posters

We have plenty of the Halloween posters (No trick or treat) here at the station, if you'd like any, please get in touch and we'll drop them off to you.

Golden Valley & Hereford Rural South Local Policing Teams

PC 2176 Wendy Powell 07811 131525

CSO 6173 Fiona Witcher 07779 141232 CSO 6366

James Cooke 07779 141223

CSO 6482 Katie Middleton 07779 141223

Email goldenvalley.lpt@westmercia.pnn.police.uk

Non emergency number 101

Events at Hereford Cathedral

Making an Impression

An exhibition of seals from the cathedral collections from 1100-1900. Mappa Mundi and Chained Library Exhibition: normal charges and opening hours apply: please see the cathedral website for full details.

www.herefordcathedral.org

Hereford's Beckett Reliquary, the only known example still in its original Ecclesiastical ownership, will also be on display alongside the exhibition.

Thursday 1 November

Festival of Lessons & Carols: applications open for free tickets for the Festival of Lessons & Carols (22 & 23 December, 7 pm). Requests, containing a note of the number required and which evening you would like to attend, should be sent with a stamped reply envelope to 'Carol service tickets, 5 College Cloisters, Hereford HR1 2NG'.

Friday 2 November

All Souls Day Eucharist with music from Fauré's Requiem. If you would like to include names of departed relatives or friends in the list of those to be remembered during the Eucharist please leave their name with the Vestry (01432 374234) or email office@herefordcathedral.org. 5.30 pm

Sunday 11 November

Remembrance Sunday: the Cathedral Eucharist, with music from Durufié's Requiem. 10 am

Sunday 11 November

The Evening Hour: a service of prayer for healing and wholeness with words and music from Iona and Taizé and time for quiet reflection; all are welcome. The service is held on the second Sunday of each month. 5.30 pm

Saturday 17 November

Hereford Choral Society's perform an evening of choral classics. Ticket information 0845 46 33 124 or e mail tickets@herefordchoralsociety.org 7.30 pm

Local News

We are sad to say farewell to the **Rev. David and Jane Johnson** who lived at wormelow and have worked tirelessly in the area for the last 8 years or so. David has taken many Church services in all the parishes of the Wormelow Hundred group and also instigated the monthly 'Healing Service'. Jane has been involved with the 'Horizons Group' which has raised lots of money for good causes and also got together a 'Knitting Group' which met on a monthly basis. David and Jane delivered 'Meals on Wheels' for some 6 years in the local area. We wish them both a second happy retirement as they move to Bodenham to be nearer the family.

We also say a 'sort of farewell' this month to **Dot and Gerald Skyrme** as they are wisely downsizing and moving into Hereford, but no doubt we shall see them around in the future. Gerald moved to Lower House Farm, Little Birch, in 1944 with his family and finished his final year at Little Birch School under the tutelage of Miss Nellie Pritchard.

Dot (nee Thomas) was born at Little Dewchurch and went to school there and also being of a farming family, met up with Gerald at Young Farmers and many of the local dances at the time. They were married in 1974 and farmed Lower House and the Warren Farm and built up a very good dairy herd. They retired in 1993 and built a new house, 'The Sycamores', on adjacent land. Dot was very much involved with the Village Hall when it was re-opened in 1977 and was instrumental in the group who ran the 'Mini-Agricultural Shows' for some 12 years. In their so called retirement, Dot and Gerald took up indoor bowling at Wormelow and then outdoors at St. Martins Bowling Club, with Dot being Ladies Captain over many seasons and was elected County President about 5 years ago.

She has always been well known in the floristry trade having worked in a shop in St Owens Street for many years and has been in great demand for floral arrangements for weddings, funerals and other special occasions and has judged Floral Art Classes at many of our local shows. She has 'done the flowers' at the Methodist Chapel for many years up until it's recent closure. Dot and Gerald have kindly hosted the Church Annual Fete for a number of years and worked hard to ensure its success. Gerald became a great walker after retiring and with 'Meg', their sheepdog, thought nothing of walking 5 or 10 miles each day throughout the local parishes. They will be greatly missed and we wish them every happiness in their new home.

As reported last month, **Mr Bill Rowan** passed away at the age of 89 years. He was born in Liverpool but his father died when he was very young, leaving his mother to bring up Bill and his sister. He had a very strict 'Bretheren' upbringing and was not allowed to mix with other young people. He missed the entrance examination for the Grammar School due to illness and so went to the Technical College in Liverpool where he did extremely well. However, he always yearned for the outdoor life and went to work on a local farm.

Bill then took up as a cowman on 2 farms near Halifax but during the war and being a 'conscientious objector' was allowed to continue in farm work but had to join the AFS (Auxilliary Fire Service) and had to work all night during enemy air raids. Bill was married to Dorothy soon after the war and they eventually moved to work on a farm at Glasbury, where Hazel and Helen were born. Sadly, Hazel contracted meningitis and eventually had to be taken into care as the family expanded with the arrival of John.

In 1954, the family moved to 'Crossways' at the bottom of Parish Lane, Little Birch, to take over a very run down small holding. Bill kept 2 cows and poultry and

had to work for Bibby's Seed Merchants and Animal Feeds Manufacturers, Suttons Seeds and take other temporary jobs in Hereford to provide for the family whilst building up the market gardening business.

Dorothy also worked tirelessly with the poultry as well as bringing up the family, which had increased with the arrival of Hilary. In due time, 2 fields across the road were purchased and Bill produced excellent crops of lettuce, cabbages and celery, the young plants being raised in a 'Dutch Light' greenhouse at 'Crossways'. As time went by, Bill bought machinery and made the job of planting the seedlings in 'blocks' a much quicker operation, but still very hard work. Marion Turner worked alongside Dorothy on the planting machine pulled by Bill driving his David Brown tractor, which required tremendous concentration.

As the years went by, Bill built up the fertility of the soil with 'green manures' and any farm animal waste that was available. He soon realised that water for the crops was essential for success and sunk a borehole at the bottom of the first field, which supplied copious quantities of water all the year round.

This enabled Bill to concentrate wholly in the production of self blanching celery, which was always in great demand by the wholesalers in Hereford and Cheltenham. Dorothy was one of the founding group for the Little Birch Mini- Agricultural Show and Bill and John laboured alongside to set up the Show and clear up afterwards,

On retirement, Bill built a new bungalow, 'Innisfree' and built in many unique features including a piped system for 'Hoovering' with access points in each room and an electric heating system based on heating a 'large capacity insulated slab' which could be charged with off-peak power and then used throughout the day as and when appropriate.

Sadly, the marriage to Dorothy broke down and Dorothy moved into Hereford. Bill was a Committee member of the Gardening Club and gave invaluable advice on vegetable growing to the members and also judged at some local shows. He was also a member of Little Birch Village Hall Committee for several years in the early 1990's. Bill joined the Quakers at the Friends Meeting House in Hereford and became involved with working as a Samaritan and with the group 'Open Door', that provided meals for the homeless over the Christmas and New Year period. Although a Quaker, Bill was a generous contributor to Little Birch Church funds and together with John, dug the long deep trench to take a power supply from Much Birch Church down to the entrance gates. He met Margaret at the Quaker meetings and they have been married for some 20 years.

Margaret was as keen a gardener as Bill and together they built up an excellent garden which was full of colour throughout the year. John sadly died about 8 years ago. Bill was generous both with his time and the crops he produced and in recent years supported and worked at St. Michael's Hospice.

Unfortunately, he developed late-onset diabetes, which gradually affected his eyesight and caused much frustration over the last couple of years. Margaret too had been affected with Parkinson's disease for several years and so some months ago they decided to move into care. Bill wanted his life to end as he had been such an active man and in the end just gave up.

A Service of Thanksgiving for his Life took place at the Friends Meeting House and many tributes were given for a life well lived. We send our condolences to Margaret, Helen and Hilary and their families.

It is with great sadness to report the death of baby **Betsy Gillespie –Fernyhough**. She survived just a few hours after her birth and we send our heartfelt sympathies to Carla, John and brother, Freddie, and to the Gillespie and Fernyhough grandparents and families.

On 19th October, Birch Chapel was full to capacity and the congregation overflowed outside for the 'Service of Thanksgiving for the Life of **Joan Rees**. Joan sadly died after a long illness on 7th. October, at the age of 73 years. She was born in Treherbert in the Rhondda Valley to David and Edith Rees, her father being a miner but who with his wife went on to run a well-known grocery shop. She also had a brother, Gwyn, who was sometime Mayor of the Rhondda and a long time secretary of Treherbert RFC.

Joan attended Porth County Grammar School for Girls, trained as a teacher and moved from her beloved Rhondda to Birmingham and Somerset before settling in Herefordshire with husband, Tony, who came from Abercynon and was deputy head teacher at Belmont Abbey Boys School.

Joan spent 30 years as a teacher and was Head of Drama at Grafton and Haywood High Schools and was later appointed Head teacher of the Margaret Allen (the Redcap) School. She was well respected and much loved by her pupils and enthused them to perform in drama with her inspirational teaching. When she retired, the staff and pupils arranged for her to be flown home by helicopter, which she acknowledged as a great honour. Tony and Joan have 2 children, Beth and **Giles**, of whom they are immensely proud. Beth is a Financial Services Regulator in London and Giles is a journalist and teacher who, until recently was based in Moscow. Joan was a committed Methodist and was a faithful and

regular worshipper at the Chapel and was extremely sad when it closed in March this year. Joan enjoyed writing prose and poetry in her retirement and often wrote both for special occasions at the Chapel. She was instrumental in forming a 'writers group' and a 'Collection of Words and Pictures' of local life and history was printed for the Millenium. A copy of this was recently buried in the 'Time Capsule' on the Parish Field on Barrack Hill.

Now the picturesque chapel has been opened once more for her funeral service, which was conducted by Rev. David Meacham with son Giles giving the Eulogy and grandson, Kieran reading from St John chapter 14. The singing of the hymns Love Divine and Guide me O Thou Great Redeemer set to great Welsh tunes were sung with great fervour and tested the fabric of the chapel to it's limits.

Joan became ill over 10 years ago and words cannot express the devotion and care that Tony gave to Joan 24 hours a day, with some help eventually from members of the community and local nurses. We salute him!

So we say farewell to an outstanding teacher, wife, mother and grandmother who will be sadly missed by the family and literally, hundreds of friends.

Donations in memory of Joan were given to Barnardo's Operation Smile, MacMillan Cancer Support and St. Michaels Hospice, where Joan often attended the day centre.

We extend to Tony, Beth and Giles and their families our deepest heartfelt sympathy.

It is with great regret to report that **Mr. Harry Gardner** of Little Birch Road, collapsed and died suddenly last week. Our sincere condolences are extended to all the family in their tragic loss.

Fundraising for Much Birch Church

We would like to say a huge thank you to everyone who supported us at our Fundraising effort at the Flu' Clinic on 13th October, to those who so generously supplied cakes and pies to sell, to those who worked hard on the day to run the stall and to those who supported us as generous customers. We raised in excess of £400.

Other events planned are:

A Stall at Ross-on-Wye Market Hall on 2nd November commencing at 9am. We would be so grateful for contributions of homemade cakes again, groceries, jams, preserves, good bric-a-brac and crafts. We will be in the Arthur Harris Room at Much Birch Community Hall (entry by the side door, up the ramp) from 10.30am until 1pm on the day before to receive any goods or if anyone has difficulty in delivering items

at that time, please ring 01981 540980

A Sale of Nearly New Designer, Classic and Good Quality Clothes on 23rd November from 2pm until 4.30pm in the Arthur Harris Room at Much Birch Community Hall (alongside the Village market). Again we would be grateful for donated clothes (not Jumble Sale items) and we will be in the Arthur Harris Room to receive any items from 10am until 1pm on Thursday 22nd November or ring 01981 51130 or 540980 to arrange alternative delivery or collection.

There will also be an **Antiques Valuation Evening** on 30th November 2012 at 7pm in Much Birch Community Hall. Everyone warmly welcome.

Castle Inn Group

The Castle Inn Group (formerly the Save the Castle Inn Campaign) is holding its AGM on Thursday November 22nd in Little Birch Village Hall at 7.30. All members of the public are welcome, please come along. There will be a chance to have your say.

Parish Field – Diamond Jubilee Project

You have probably noticed that there has been a great clearance job on Parish Field, thanks to Quinton Bibby. There are still some small roots showing above the surface and these are gradually being removed. Any re-growth of weeds which takes place during the winter will be dealt with then final preparation and seeding will take place in the spring. This is when help will be most needed. In the mean time, if you would like to be part of this please ring 01981 540791 or talk to anyone on the Parish Council or Village Hall Committee.

The Birches New Years Eve Party

Little Birch Village Hall on Dec 31st. with DJ Wolfie Children under 4 years have free entry. There will be a Bar and Refreshments. Fancy Dress optional. Tickets for the Party will be available from 17th. Nov –21st Dec at £6. After that date, any remaining tickets will cost £10. Don't leave it too late! Tickets are already being reserved! Call 01981 541027, 01981 540401 or 01981 540068.

Little Birch Village Hall Committee

Community Book Exchange/Lending Library

The next meeting for the "Book Exchange" will be on Saturday 3 November 10-12a.m. at little Birch Village Hall. A large selection of books to suit all ages and a variety of interests will be available as well as an

opportunity to meet others over a cup of tea/coffee. There is a charge of £1 per adult towards the cost of hall hire, hearing and refreshments. We look forward to seeing you there.

Whist Drive

Our next Whist Drive will be on Tuesday 13 November in Little Birch Village Hall. We shall start at 7.30.p.m. The entrance fee is £ 2.00. Excellent prizes and refreshments will be available. New players are always welcome.

A year the Life of a Dairy Farmer

We live surrounded by farmland but how many of us know of the work our farmers do? Bob and Sue Mason of Merrivale Farm have kindly agreed to give an illustrated talk at Little Birch Village Hall at 7.30pm on Nov 14th, to tell us about their work through the year as Dairy farmers. There will be an opportunity to ask questions and a light supper will be provided. Entrance £3.50.

Annual Pantomime

Auditions and rehearsals now underway for Jack and the Beanstalk at LBVH to be performed 8/9 February 2013.

Much Birch 100 Club Draw

The October draw took place on 12th October 2012 in Much Birch Community Hall at 11am. The winners were:

1. No 92 – Mrs. J. Goldsmith, Much Birch
2. No 23 - Mr. R. Thomas, King's Thorn

The next draw will take place on Tuesday 6th November 2012 at 7 pm in Much Birch Community Hall

John Jones – Chairman

Much Birch Parish Council

Parish Clerk Mrs Alison Wright, Longfield House, Gooses Foot, Kingstone, Herefordshire HR2 9NE
Tel. 01981 250860

PARISH MEETING – at the Parish Meeting held on the 13th September, at the Much Birch Community Hall, Councillors were addressed by members of the public about Parish matters and heard an update from Ward Councillor Russell Hamilton about Herefordshire Council, and some items relating to local matters including Neighbourhood Planning and Traffic Regulation Orders.

Following on from the recent resignations, of three

parish councillors, there had been a successful information evening held on October 1st and a new councillor joined the Parish Council, at the September 13th meeting. He is Mr Jon Norris and a big welcome is extended to him as our new Parish Councillor. A new Chair, Mrs Alison Cook, was elected plus a new Vice Chair, Mr Steve Turner. We are still looking for further new councillors, if anyone out there is interested in joining us.

It is hoped that there will be discussions regarding the setting of the Precept and Parish Council budgetary spending for 2013/2014, at the next meeting on the 25th October, so do come along if you have any questions, or wish to contribute ideas for consideration. Full minutes of the meetings etc. can be found on the Parish Council website following the link found in this summary. www.muchbirchparish.org.uk.

The next meeting of the Parish Council will be on Thursday 25th October, 7.30pm at Much Birch Community Hall. Please see notice boards and website for agendas. As always the public and press are more than welcome to attend and will have the opportunity to speak directly to their representatives.

Much Birch WI

Much Birch WI takes place in Much Birch Community Hall, signed just off the A49, on the third Tuesday of the month at 7.30pm.

The meeting on 20th November will be our Annual Meeting

Potential members and visitors are always welcome. Please ring Kath, 01981 540382, if you would like to know more about Much Birch WI.

Little Birch and King's Thorn Gardening Club

The 'Molecatcher' evening on 24th Sep was well attended and the audience a humorous and entertaining show as Jeff Nicholls, from Berkshire, delved into the strange and mysterious world of the humble mole. The first half of the evening was pure showmanship with special effects of lighting and sound controlled by Mrs. Nicholls. The Question and Answer section was very constructive and debunked the deterrent effects of windmills, bottle tops and sonic impulses. It was good to hear that more humane traps have been developed to replace the old established spring release clamps, which could result in a slow death.

The most important point in setting a trap was to find the 'resting lair' or nest, usually found by probing carefully along the hedge, fence or wall and then tracing the 'run', often not visible because of it being slightly deeper, and placing the trap in this most used

run. All in all, a very enjoyable and educational evening.

'**The Show Circuit and Designing a Show Garden**' will be the subject of the next meeting on Wed. Nov 28th. at 7.30pm in Little Birch Village Hall. The speaker will be Leila Jackson BSc who is a nursery owner and promises a lively talk and slide show with amusing anecdotes and props.

On Wed., Dec 5th we shall enjoy our usual Winter Social with an evening of fun and feasting to start off the winter and Christmas social events.

Much Birch Village Market

The Village Market takes place on the 4th Friday of the month in Much Birch Community Hall, signed just off the A49, between 2.30pm and 4.30pm.

On November, 23rd we hope to be welcoming our usual local suppliers: the award winning Squeaky Pig, producers of rare breed pork and delicious sausage (including Gluten Free, made to order): the award winning Moor Meals, producers of Dexter beef, ready meals and pies: Jane Symonds represents Llandinabo Farm Shop, bringing, among other things, chicken, duck, and lamb: Castle Cheese, Mr. G's chutneys, jams and pickles, filled savoury pancakes will be brought by Anthea, Trefor will be here with quiches, both savoury and sweet and, after many requests, a vegetable stall. Sarah Snell will be bringing along apples and pears together with fruit juices.

Dan will be with us to sharpen tools etc.

We are delighted to welcome back Ray with her hand made chocolates, in time for Christmas, (but, who needs an excuse?)

There is a Fair Trade stand, craft stands.

Much Birch WI has a book stall, raising money for The Cobalt Trust, its Charity of the Year.

Refreshments are made and sold by Chris and Peter, all the proceeds of which go to McMillan Cancer Support. This information is correct at the time of writing.

However, because of events out of my control, I cannot guarantee attendance by everyone mentioned.

Our Village Market needs your support in order to continue bringing local food to Much Birch.

For further details, please contact Kath, 01981 540382

And Finally

The following appeared in a college newsletter received by a local resident.

A father passing by his son's bedroom was astonished to see that the bed was made and everything picked up. Then, he saw an envelope propped up prominently on the pillow. It was addressed "Dad"

With the worst premonition, he opened the envelope and, with trembling hands read the letter...

Dear Dad, it is with great regret and sorrow that I am writing to you. I had to elope with my new girlfriend because I wanted to avoid a scene with you and Mum. I've been finding real passion with Stacy and she is so nice, but I knew you would not approve of her because of all her piercings, tattoos, her tight motorcycle clothes and because she is so much older than I am.

But it's not only the passion, Dad. She's pregnant. Stacy said that we will be very happy. She owns a trailer in the woods and has a stock of firewood for the whole winter. We share dreams of having many more children.

Stacy has opened my eyes to the fact that marijuana doesn't really hurt anyone. We'll be growing it for ourselves and trading it with other people in the commune for all the cocaine and ecstasy we want.

In the meantime, we'll pray that science will find a cure for AIDs, so that Stacy can get better. She deserves it! Don't worry Dad, I'm 15 and I know how to take care of myself.

Someday, I'm sure we'll be back to visit, so you can get to know your many grandchildren.

Love Your Son Joshua

P.S. Dad, none of the above is true. I'm over at Jason's house. I just wanted to remind you that there are worse things in life than the school report that's on the kitchen table.

Call me when it's safe to come home.