

Dear Family and Friends,

December, 2013

A few months ago we made a shocking discovery that has completely changed our lives. It was devastating news, and we are still trying to figure out exactly how to handle it. We have talked to a number of experts on the subject, but none have offered a solution that works. So it is with a heavy heart that we report our news to you: we have a teenager living in our house.

Our first hint of an infestation came a few years ago when we started hearing odd noises from the rear of the house. Sometimes they sounded like alternative rock, sometimes European electronic, and sometimes (we can't quite explain this one) Broadway musicals. The sounds would appear at odd hours when no sensible organism would be awake and listening to music, such as 1 P.M. Stranger still were the occasional emanations from the back seat of the car, things that seemed to consist of singing without any guitar accompaniment. Did you know that it is possible to sing pop tunes without a guitar? We had no idea.

We will freely admit that we were slow to recognize the seriousness of the problem. We went into denial: surely this was our imagination. The last time we checked, Xandie had only been about six years old, with a charming belief in fairies and fat bearded men in red suits. Even though a year or two has passed since then, we were sure that she was still just as adorable. The sounds we heard were probably coming from our devout neighbors, who sometimes held silent prayer meetings that reached 20 or even 30 decibels in volume.

But although our head-in-the-sand approach had proven effective many times in the past, in this case the symptoms only escalated. Unfamiliar words like “awks”¹ and “totes”² began to creep into our vocabulary. Nail polish would suddenly appear on the kitchen counter (sometimes not in the bottle). We found ourselves besieged with requests for transportation to mysterious demonic activities such as “Late Night at the Wolfpacket,” “DC Dice,” and even “football.” We soon became angry: what was this phenomenon, and why was it invading our formerly peaceful lives?

Our anger grew, and we started to act out. “How dare you ask permission to go to Disneyland when your room isn't clean? Look, here's a mote of dust on your windowsill! Get your act together, young lady, or we won't pay for any college!” But no matter how we raged, Xandie remained unruffled. She seemed to have a solid grip on that unique teen talent, “ignoring my parents.” We would ground her for 87 years, only to discover that she suddenly needed us to drive her to the mall so she could shop for a birthday present for one of us—or if that wasn't convincing enough, for a starving crippled child in Africa. With a cute kitten in its arms.



***Anybody* Could Have
Tripped Over That Wire!**

These antics only increased our fury. In frustration, we hired a noted “teen whisperer.” She promised effective communication or your money back. And we confess that she did indeed achieve communication, in the sense that we could have heard the screams of defiance from across the Pacific Ocean. We asked for a refund, which was cheerfully provided—one Greek drachma for each dollar paid.

By this point we were desperate. We offered the teenager a bargain: “We'll take you on a college tour if only you'll pick up one single sock from your floor.” Finally, something worked! The blue sock was lifted, carried, transported as if by magic into the laundry basket. (Its mate had long since vanished into that weird netherland known to everyone who has ever had an unfortunate encounter with a washing machine.) In heartfelt gratitude, we immediately began planning a round-the-world trip that would cover Stanford, Oxford, and North-South University in Bangladesh.

That was when reality set in. Geoff had work commitments through early August, and Pat had to be back home by the middle of that month to prepare for fall classes. And of course there was the minor issue of money. So we dropped Oxford and (reluctantly) Bangladesh, and settled on a tour of a few West Coast U.S. schools. In the end, we drove through two and walked through three. At the third, we watched a building explode (not Xandie's fault! Really!) before heading home. Little had been accomplished beyond visiting a few tourist destinations and buying a Mills College sweatshirt.

¹Awkward.

²Totally.

Life had become depressing. Summer was over, the weather was worsening, and the teenage infestation had only grown worse. “YOLO!”³ shouted Xandie as she headed out to “chillax”⁴ with her friends. Pat and Geoff sank into a deep funk. Would their lives ever be normal again? Would this stranger, who had once been their daughter, ever reappear? Would Christmas ever arrive?

As fall wore on, signs of serious trouble began to manifest themselves. Geoff stopped shaving and could often be found in front of his computer, muttering something about “Googling” for “how to talk slang.” Pat sat in front of *her* computer too, constantly refreshing her Facebook page in the vain hope of getting advice from other people with the same teenage problems.



On the Road

And then, just as things seemed darkest, we realized that we had no choice. We may have been “noobs”⁵ at the whole thing, but we decided we might as well accept the reality and just deal with it. Maybe a sock on the floor wasn’t such a bad thing after all; it was a sign that there was life in the house. Maybe when Xandie went out, it was a chance to check out some of those more sophisticated movies that we hadn’t been able to watch as a family, things like “Grown-Ups” and “Scooby Doo 2.” And maybe, just maybe, life with a teenager could be OK instead of “cray-cray.”⁶

And that’s when the Great German Adventure began. It seems that Xandie has been taking German in high school for over two years, and now she had the opportunity to go on an exchange trip to Munich. Since Pat and Geoff had run out of resistance, they of course agreed. And in a fit of utter madness (possibly influenced by the availability of German beer) Geoff offered to go along as a chaperone. Two weeks in Germany! With 13 high-school kids! In the dead of winter! Missing Thanksgiving *and* his wedding anniversary! (Pat suggested that he should get a psychiatric evaluation, but he was unable to locate his insurance card.)

So off Geoff and Xandie went. Xandie was hosted by a lovely German girl her own age, and they hit it off famously (perhaps because they share a love of expensive horses). Geoff stayed with one of the German high-school teachers, who introduced him to soccer and her grandchild (he thought the baby was more interesting). Both of them joined the other U.S. students on tours of castles, museums, Christmas markets, and that most traditional of German entertainments, the BMW factory. Meanwhile, Pat gardened, relaxed in the garden, landscaped the garden, gardened more, and occasionally used Skype to make fun of Geoff for freezing his butt off while it was 80° in Claremont.

But here’s the odd thing: all three of us had fun, somehow there were no socks on the floor for Pat to complain about, and the house stayed remarkably tidy.

So to all of you parents who are suddenly suffering from a teen infestation, we have a solution: send them to Germany. With their dads (if the dads, like most dads, are just as messy as the kids).

Just don’t let them come back.

Love,

Geoff Pat Xandie



German Friend Gerd



At Nymphenburg Palace With German Host Lia

³You Only Live Once.

⁴Chill out and relax.

⁵Newbies, i.e., beginners.

⁶Crazy.