

Our FAB-3 will be home for Christmas



Your Turn

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Guest columnist

A lifetime ago, I wrote about parenting in these pages, with my three children in starring roles. After six years, I decided I'd exploited them long enough and gave it up.

And now, just this month, my Three Little Anecdotes, our FAB-3, are gone. Flown the nest. Fled the coop. The last has moved with little chance of boomer-ang-ing home again.

No. 1 left at 18, never to share our address again. No. 2 was in and out through college, then gone for good after graduation. No. 3 just moved out, flush with a grad degree and first full-time job.

The house is quiet. The dogs are lonely. On the plus side, I got my husband to clean the basement, and we found homes for most of their childhood furniture.

Our children, meanwhile, are living

their best lives.

Frances is a K-6 art teacher. She and her partner, Andy, like to host friends for game nights and dress-up parties. She invites her siblings and sometimes even her parents.

Arthur took over an uncle's coffee roasting business. Once the pickiest of eaters, he's now an inventive cook. And he's in two new-ish relationships – one with a cat! (But, we wait, we are a dog family!)

No. 3 – forever our Baby Beatrice – is working in business consulting and resuming her pandemic-paused night life.

They are off in the world doing what 20-somethings should and must – establishing careers, building relationships, leaving their family of origin to find and (eventually) make families of their own.

That is exactly what I did when I finished college in Nebraska in 1983. I piled my belongings in the back seat of my Dodge Aspen, drove 500 miles west to take a reporting job in Colorado.

Six months later, I drove 500 miles back to Nebraska for another short-lived job, then hundreds more to Indi-

ana and eventually a bit more to Ohio.

Early on, I was home for Christmas. Then, over time, more sporadically. After marriage and babies, we'd see my folks in Arkansas and my husband's in Wisconsin when we could – but not always for Christmas. We sent presents. We called. But too often we skipped the travel.

Now, I think of my parents often each December.

My dad, a stand-up guy in every way, died at 80, taken by a stroke a few weeks before Christmas in 2010.

Our Gal Mare, my sweet and salty mom, died three years and a few weeks later, at 77, also following a stroke. She'd been alone that last Christmas, looking forward to a family wedding in January that she would not make.

I never really thought about whether they felt abandoned or neglected when they spent Christmases alone, first in Nebraska, then in Arkansas.

They never let on. Instead, they said what I will no doubt say some year: No! It's fine! You're busy! We'll see you soon. Call, if you can.

That year is not this year.

Our FAB-3, all living nearby, will be home for Christmas. They'll join us for a Christmas Eve feast with aunts and uncles and cousins, and, if we're lucky, mass before that.

On Christmas morning, they'll bring brunch plates to the living room to empty their stockings and unwrap their gifts. After that, they'll argue over whether to walk the dogs before we see a movie or after.

They will be loud and messy. Someone will break something. Someone will get mad at someone else.

Then they will leave, to resume the lives they are living.

Because they are close, we will see them again – and often – in the weeks and months ahead. Birthdays, cook-outs, holidays and maybe even a summer vacation. I will not ask about Christmas 2022 because, really, that's so, so far away.

But I will have had them for Christmas 2021 and, for now, that is quite enough.

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