

Dear Family:

30 September 2001

First things first. Crystal is due to give birth to our third child in early April (which means, if history is any indicator, that it will come in late April). Unimpressed by her two previous encounters with obstetric medicine, this daughter and sister of M.D.'s has actually elected to go the midwife route this time around. Yeah, I know, it surprised me too. Next thing I know, she'll be dialing up the old chiropractor/herbalife/noni juice distributor for relief from pregnancy-related discomfort. But what are you going to do?

I actually began mentally writing this letter during the late morning hours of September 11 as I hustled on foot through the gridlocked streets of an utterly panicked downtown Washington. While it seems a little silly in retrospect, it really felt as though I had somehow been transported into the pages of a bad Tom Clancy novel (i.e., any Tom Clancy novel written after 1989), running for my life from invisible terrorists poised to strike again at any moment. A little perspective:

Family members who regularly make it all the way to the bottom of these letters may recall that I'm presently on a work engagement at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. I work at an office in southwest Washington that looks out over the river toward (presently vacant) National Airport. Part of our building and an adjoining hotel obstruct our view of the Pentagon, but they couldn't hide the thick black smoke billowing out of it. We noticed it and, unaware of anything going on in New York, started looking at one another, shrugging our shoulders, and generally wondering what had happened. Within a few minutes, details, some true, but most not, started pouring in about the events of the morning. We were under attack. They'd hit the World Trade Center (though both towers still stood) and the Pentagon. Those were the only accurate details. Word quickly spread around the office that terrorists had also hit the State Department, the Old Executive Office Building, and the Metro. Unsure how safe the streets would be (and with nary a clue of how I'd get anywhere since the Metro was reportedly shut down) I nevertheless concluded that a federal building was a less than ideal place to be hanging out, and set off for a long walk home. I walked past the entrance of the L'Enfant Plaza Metro station (my usual downtown stop) and noticed people going in and coming out as if everything were normal. Incredulous, I asked several exiting passengers if trains were running. I was told they were, but my irrational fear of being trapped underground prevailed, and I kept walking, joining the mass of humanity fleeing downtown. Those of us on foot were easily outpacing the cars. It was 11 a.m. and worse than any rush hour I'd ever witnessed. I gritted my teeth and stepped it up slightly as I crossed the Mall. (Word had it there were bombs there too.) Glancing to my left and right, I was pleasantly surprised (honestly) to see the Washington Monument and Capitol still standing and undamaged. My chosen route took me through Chinatown and certain other neighborhoods seldom frequented by people who look like me, and ended at the Rhode Island Avenue Metro station in Northeast DC; a destination I chose because it was above ground and on the red line (my line). It wasn't until I got home that I learned the extent of the New York carnage—that the buildings had actually come down, and that most of our fears here in Washington were imagined. It also began to settle in that our area's contribution to the national tragedy (a sub-calamity of mere Oklahoma City proportions) was destined for footnote status on this truly horrible day.

Despite Hannah's school's persistent attempts to strike fear into the hearts of its students, she remains, for the most part, blissfully ignorant of all this, and has thoroughly enjoyed her first month of kindergarten. (She came home from school on the 13th asking if we'd ever be able to visit Great-Grandma Willis in Utah again. When we told her we probably would, she asked, "You mean when all the planes are done being broken?" Several days later, while the networks were still on marathon building-collapse coverage, Hannah caught a glimpse of the smoking towers and remarked indignantly, "Oh no, they're talking about *this* again?") Interestingly, Lucy appears to be having the hardest time adjusting to Hannah's new "big girl" schedule, and frequently cries during Hannah's 3-hour school day, yearning to play with her.

Crystal began the month attending rehearsals for a bi-stake production of "Hello, Dolly!." The show was ultimately scrubbed when the directors were unable to pull together enough talent to cast the many, many male roles. This should have come as no surprise. Indeed, our religion's somewhat rigid stance on homosexuality makes it unlikely that we'll ever be able to field enough male singers and dancers to pull off Hello, Dolly!.

Work has more or less returned to normal. Riding on Metro still gives me pause, but apparently I'm not alone. I ran into one of our friendly former Folk Street neighbors on the train platform on The Day After. Whereas he had previously commented to me about how he almost never makes it to Temple, (owing to kids' soccer and other Saturday commitments) this day he was sporting his yarmulke (for the first time that I'd seen) and piously poring over his Torah (or some other big red Hebrew book—what do I know?). Nothing like a little terrorism to bring things into perspective.

I'm sure other stuff happened this month, but who really cares? Hope everyone's well.
Love, Tim, Crystal, Hannah & Lucy