

Dear Family

29 December 2001

I've spent a considerable portion of the past month fretting over how I might most appropriately write a tribute to my Grandmother Willis who died the week after Thanksgiving. I struggle not so much in finding something good to say—indeed, there seems to be enough of that to fill eight eulogies—as in identifying a unique personal experience that adequately encapsulates her goodness. It's been a month and I still can't think of one. This is at least partially my fault. The relative infrequency of my visits to Salt Lake during my four years at BYU (a surprising phenomenon given my lack of fondness for Provo) is well documented. The result of this is that most, if not all, of what I did with Grandma could be written just as well by any of her 30 other grandchildren. This, however, does not in any way diminish the value of those interactions. How special I felt at her willingness to travel across the country to attend my various childhood rites of passage. During these and other times, the attention she and Grandpa paid me made me feel like I wasn't sharing them with anyone. I can't remember during which family reunion it was that I was somewhat deflated to learn that the Smurfs card game wasn't something she only played with my brothers and me. Distance made it impractical for my children to see their Great-grandma Willis regularly. But however brief and sporadic, these encounters had a lasting impact, particularly on Hannah, who took the news of Grandma's passing much harder than I had anticipated. We needed to reassure her in the days following September 11 that all the planes wouldn't be "broken" forever, and that she would indeed be able to see Great-grandma Willis again*. It turns out we were only half-right. Anecdotes demonstrating her untiring thoughtfulness dominated the weekend of the funeral. Emulating the Savior, she quietly, often silently, "went about doing good." Many of her good deeds did not surface until the days following her death. Still others will doubtless never be known. If she had a fault, it was her impatience with family members (I can't have been the only one) who failed to show gratitude or otherwise exhibited thoughtless behavior. In retrospect, it shouldn't surprise me that one whose life was defined by altruism would be annoyed by selfishness. At times I contrast this with things that annoy me (incorrect use of the word "ironic," left lane cruising, the popular view that Bill Clinton didn't commit perjury, etc.) and realize the extent to which my work is cut out for me.

I had four living grandparents when we moved to Washington 5 ½ years ago. At the start of 2001 I still had both of my grandmothers. Left now with Mom and Dad as my only living progenitors I am left to reflect on my good fortune to have had such wonderful grandparents as role models for so much of my life. All demonstrated seemingly unconditional love for me in countless ways. A life patterned after any one of theirs would all but certainly merit an Eternal reward. Granted the opportunity to follow all four, I am left with few excuses for failure.

* Note to other remote relatives: She misses you too. Great-grandma Willis's position in Hannah's mind might have been influenced slightly by their family reunion time together less than a month earlier. Please continue sending Christmas and birthday presents. See you this summer.

Much of this already long letter is being written during the third leg of a 650-mile triangle that began Christmas morning. The children kicked the day off by ceremoniously rolling around on the new bunk beds that Santa brought and opening the many gifts sent by Pacific time zone-based family members. Leaving the house a wasteland of open boxes and wrapping paper, we headed northeast to Moorestown, arriving in time to participate in the federally mandated trip to Mrs. Pittman's (our piano teacher) house, prior to Christmas "dinner" (at 2 pm). Christmas dinner only gets a mention here because it featured my first ever encounter with fried turkey. Not surprisingly, it was the best tasting turkey I've ever had. The half-hour cooking time (and the existence of an eager turkey-fryer-owning ward member) made it an especially appealing option to Mom, who may never again stick a turkey in the oven.

We enjoyed the next two days with everybody in Moorestown (plus Coco, Andrew and Jessica) before heading due south to Chesapeake, VA, for a fun-filled day-and-two-thirds with Marci and Noah. (For the uninitiated, Chesapeake can probably be best characterized as a suburb of Norfolk, and is just south of Virginia Beach.) Roland lives there too, but is currently living the life of a surgical intern, and spends most of his waking (and sleeping) hours at the naval hospital in Portsmouth. We stopped by with pizza during one of his on-call all-nighters. He was cool enough to locate and hook Crystal up to an available ultrasound machine. The fetus, which proved unwilling to spread 'em during Crystal's initial ultrasound earlier this month, was slightly less inhibited this time around, and Roland was able to predict with 75 percent certainty that we'd be having another girl in April. We are now officially ignoring name suggestions. Our remaining time in Southern Virginia, which included a chilly walk on the beach, was enjoyable. It was fun watching Hannah and Noah catch up. So we're now making our way northwest to Washington. In five miles, we will drive by Fort A P Hill, a place I will henceforth and forever associate with David Willis and rain. Lucy is sleeping and Hannah is in the midst of a seemingly interminable line of questioning ostensibly geared toward ascertaining how much longer we'll be in the car. It seems to baffle her that a single "street" (I-95) can be so long.

Our Season has been tiresome but enjoyable. Enjoyed seeing so many of you.

Love,
Tim, Crystal, Hannah and Lucy