

Dear Family:

Technically this is the December letter, even though it's technically January, which technically ends my 79-month (give or take) letter-writing streak. That is unless you wish to count our annual Christmas brag-o-gram as a Famlet (and why wouldn't you?) in which case the streak remains intact on a technicality. If you didn't get our Christmas card it's probably because I don't have your address. But you didn't miss much (at least not if you've been keeping up with the Famlet).

It's Sunday night, and though I'm not looking forward to the alarm clock awakening me at 4:56 tomorrow morning, I'm actually looking forward to getting back in front of my seminary class. Maybe it's because I've just finished preparing my lessons on the crucifixion for tomorrow and Tuesday. It's pretty intense text (as most everybody knows) and I'm hoping it packs enough of a wallop to shake the students from their post-vacation stupor. We'll see. Interestingly, after spending the better part of three weeks discussing the events and teachings of the night before the crucifixion, we probably won't spend more than two classes on the day of the crucifixion itself. Mel Gibson would be so disappointed. (I guess. I haven't seen the movie.)

The big event of the month was Hannah's baptism and confirmation on her eighth birthday, Saturday, December 11. All 6 of her living progenitors were in attendance (sometimes I wonder if others were looking in) along with all of her Willis aunts, uncles and cousins, plus Roland and Marci Kent's family (who, coming 200 miles from Southern Virginia, traveled farther than any of Hannah's Willis relatives).

I won't soon forget the baptismal service. Because of a dearth of youth in our stake, the program was all Hannah's. Speaking, witnessing and prayer-giving responsibilities were all handled by grandparents, while uncles (aided by Aunt Andra) provided the music. Standing first with her in the font and then behind her confirmation chair engendered some very pleasant emotions that I won't try to describe here. It's

funny, I've already forgotten whether the water was hot or cold, but I think I might always remember those feelings. Even though my mission was to France I've still performed more baptisms than I can think of right now, and yet the electricity I felt as I brought Hannah out of the water was unlike anything I'd ever felt before. [*That's because it was your daughter, you idiot.*] Yeah, I know. But I wasn't expecting it to feel *that* different. Maybe it's because Hannah was more prepared for these ordinances and for membership in the Church than any adult convert I've had the privilege of baptizing. It's certainly a possibility. I've baptized some wonderful people. But I don't know if any of them—at the time of their baptisms, anyway—had Hannah's grasp of the

covenant she was making, her love for the Scriptures, her unquenchable desire to always do the right thing, or her Godly sorrow when she doesn't. Or maybe I'm just an idiot. Probably both. Whatever it is, I'm more grateful than I can say for her and for the example she is setting for her younger sisters and I continually pray that nothing messes that up.

The other notable event was Christmas, of course. The following has become our tradition: Christmas Eve lunch at Red Lobster (a lame tradition is still a tradition); Christmas Eve dinner/gingerbread house decorating with Grant and Jen's family (this year it was at their house); Christmas morning present-opening at home; Christmas morning drive to NJ; Christmas Dinner/more present-opening with all the

Willis relatives; Spend a couple of days in NJ; Drive home; Drive to Virginia Beach (Suffolk, actually) around New Year's; Spend a couple of days with Roland and Marci's family; Give short shrift to relatives living in other time zones. (Sorry, guys. We thought about you.)

This year basically followed that model. Except this time we brought a G-I bug that infected basically everybody at Grandma's house (and that Andrew and Jessica subsequently carried down to Cape May, where they infected all the Walkers).

We hope everybody is feeling better and wish you a happy new year.



Hannah (age 8) and the author