

Dear Family:

30 April 2000

Greetings from Maryland. Temporary (hopefully) home of Juan Miguel Gonzalez, Elian Gonzalez, and a gaggle of obtuse freaks from Miami who still can't figure out why the government finally flinched after being taunted for six months.

It's Sunday. 1:30 pm. We just got home from church. The house is a mess. Boxes and furniture are strewn everywhere. Were it not Sunday (and if I didn't feel so lazy) I might try putting some things away. But I'm exhausted. So here I lay; prone on my unmade bed, eyes drooping, trying to position my laptop in as comfortable a position as possible as I pound out this month's musings. During the past 2 days, we have done little other than slowly move our lives into our new house. (Which, for those of you haven't been paying attention, is located at 100 Hannes St; Silver Spring, MD 20901.) Our phone number (previously unreleased) is 301-593-8672. Since my childhood, I've been compiling a list of questions that I hope to have answered in the next life. To this list (which includes such conundra as: How did creation work? Why do I have an appendix? and What's the deal with Texans?) I added this month: Why can't I just keep my old phone number every time I move a mile and a half? I bet Dave Barry knows why. Or at least could come up with a hilariously plausible explanation. I'd settle for either.

We spent a significant amount of time yesterday assembling a list of tasks related to the house that we'd like to accomplish. We worked on the list partially in the hope of bringing some organization to that which we'd like to accomplish. But we mostly did it because making the list was a lot easier than actually doing any of the things on the list. (As if I really needed to write down that the lawn needs mowing) But anyway, the list is now 763 pages long, doesn't even address our ugly shutters, and we'll take any help anyone feels up to offering.

Of course the easiest way to get things done is simply to pay someone else to do them. (I'll always identify with Homer Simpson's successful run for sanitation commissioner on the platform slogan, "Can't somebody else do it?") This was our watchword when it came to refinishing our hardwood floors. We got some recommendations, then hired the man who made the most attractive offer. We paid him 50% up-front. Then when he determined that most of the floorboards in the dining room needed replacement, we paid a second installment of 125%. When the job was done, we happily paid the final 50%, and now Hannah's bedroom, Lucy's bedroom, the hall, living room and dining room all have beautifully refinished hardwood floors. I don't feel as though we got bamboozled or anything. I just wish we'd ripped the carpet out of the dining room *before* getting the estimates. Oh well. Live and learn.

We really like the neighborhood. Hannah's already become friends with the three little girls who live next door. They're a little older, but are very friendly with her. When asked her name, Hannah replies proudly, "I'm Hannah Willis—I'm the big sister!" Our other next-door neighbors are an older couple (read: Mom & Dad's age) whose only remaining child at home is a 12-year-old named Timmy. He sometimes plays with the girls too, though as an elder statesman. (My first lesson on the cyclical nature of life: It's been a long time since I thought of a 12-year-old as a "big kid.") This assemblage of children now represents the only group of people on the earth (aside from the coerced clerks at Safeway) who refer to me as "Mr. Willis." I think we'll get along fine.

Crystal and I formed half of a quartet that performed today during ward conference. We sang a way cool Mack Wilberg arrangement of the American Folk Hymn "Death Shall Not Destroy My Comfort". – Note to Dad: Wilberg, about whose arrangements we're always raving, directs the BYU Men's Chorus—at least he used to. Now I think he's Associate Director of the world-famous Mormon New-Conference-Center Choir. Anyway, we were very good today (naturally.) Unfortunately we had to sing with two other people...

I still enjoy directing the ward choir. I'm a pretty good motivator and I like to accentuate the positive. For example, after a particularly bad run-through, I like to point out to the choir that they still sound better than the ensemble at the Palmyra temple dedication. The choir seems to appreciate this kind of reinforcement, and rewarded me for it Easter Sunday with better-than-I-had-anticipated renditions of various excerpts from JS Bach's *St Matthew Passion*, as well as "Since by Man Came Death" from GF Handel's *Messiah*.

Well, gotta go. Marci's invited us back to our old place for Sunday dinner. It's awfully nice of her. But we know she's really just trying to get us to remove our last few stray items of junk from her house. Fat chance.

Whoa, that was fast. We ate pork chops at Marci's, then went to the church for a baptismal service—Hannah's first since learning what baptism is. She thoroughly enjoyed watching the ordinance. But we had to take her out when she wouldn't stop singing "When Jesus Christ Was Baptized" aloud during the service. I don't really know how to teach Hannah that certain activities are appropriate in some instances and inappropriate in others. (We think it's cute that she sings, "I Love to See the Temple" when we drive by it on the Beltway, and wouldn't want to snuff out that behavior.)

Congratulations to all the BYU graduates. When I graduated in '96, the alumni association committed everyone to a pledge of 96 dollars. (Sometime around 1998, they either lost track of me, or just gave up asking for it.) I only bring up this delinquency because I'd be happy to re-up with what I can only imagine the pledge level being for the class of '00. Hope everything's groovy.

Love,
Tim, Crystal, Hannah & Lucy