

♣♣♣♣ SPECIAL FAMILY REUNION COMMEMORATIVE EDITION ♣♣♣♣

Dear Family:

25 August 2001

The past week and a half is about all I remember of this month. Unfortunately, a lot of this will not be news to those of you who attended the Bi-annual Willis Family Reunion. Sorry.

The trip west began with our own version of Planes, Trains, and Automobiles. It involved awaking early Thursday morning, driving to Forest Glen Metro Station, riding the subway (with one transfer) to National Airport, taking the shuttle to the terminal, waiting six hours for our delayed flight, flying to Las Vegas, renting a car, and driving to St. George just in time for bed. Hannah summed this up to many confused reunion attendees the following way: "We went car-train-train-bus-plane-car-Utah!" Hopefully this resolves some of the confusion she created. Incidentally, the trip home (which included circling Washington thunderstorms for two hours before ultimately being diverted to Philadelphia) was at least as miserable (and forced us to miss Rep. Gary "I'm not going to answer that question" Condit's Prime-Time "tell-all" interview) but I won't bore you with those details.

Despite suffering a devastating upset in the quarterfinals of the horseshoe tournament, the time we had was well worth the bother of lugging two small children (plus their voluminous stuff) across the country on a no-name Las Vegas-based airline. The reunion started good and got better, leaving us sad to see it end. Officially kicking off in Southern Utah's badlands with a day of family ordinance work in the St. George Temple, it really started feeling like a family reunion after everyone fled the unforgiving desert (where 110 degrees, even with no humidity, still feels like 110 degrees) for the sublime serenity of the more temperate Corry mountain wilderness property. There isn't much point in attempting to describe the place; what with the breathtaking vistas and the soothing sound of breezes rustling the quaking aspen (disturbed only occasionally by the screams of children—and Jen—hurtling down the zip line, or the wailing of ATV's and the occasional backhoe). It suffices me to say that the environment was most pleasant. Though not Willis property, the recycle-your-Dixie-cup clothesline, coupled with the broken basketball rim (notwithstanding a "No Dunks" warning painted on the backboard) helped give the place a distinctly "us" feel. Despite being offered refuge with the reunion's most "senior" attendees (plus Crystal and Lucy) in the relative comfort of Bob's brother's cabin, Hannah and her Uncle Pete elected to spend two of the three nights in my tent. Hannah, it seems, really likes camping, really likes flashlights and really really likes her cousin Travis. My compliments to reunion organizers who managed to strike just the right balance between structured activities and lounge time. Even using 10-point font, there just isn't room to give specific reunion elements the kind of detailed commentary they deserve while keeping to my self-imposed one-page limit. But basically, we enjoyed seeing everybody and Lucy stayed out of the fire pit, so the whole thing was a net positive. We hope to be able to make the next one.

We were among the last to leave Tuesday morning, and followed the Corrys to Cedar City, where they graciously permitted us to avail ourselves of their showers (and all their hot water) in an effort to remove most of the four days of accumulated camping grime. Barbara and Charlotte (assisted, presumably, by Jacob and Melissa) then provided pro bono babysitting while Crystal and I, along with Mom, Dad, Pete, Andrew and Jessica, attended a wet-your-pants-laughing funny performance of "The Pirates of Penzance" at Utah's Tony Award-winning Shakespearean Festival. I'm still scratching my head about how a Gilbert & Sullivan operetta fits in a Shakespearean Festival. But they're the ones with the Tony; I guess they can do what they want. Anyway, we spent that night chez the Corrys, and left Wednesday morning for Las Vegas.

Our flight didn't leave until Thursday, so we had 24 hours to do Las Vegas (Spanish for "Smoking Encouraged"). We had intended to head south to Hoover Dam (pardon my language) after checking in. But Hannah had had about enough of the car, and we just didn't feel like fighting it. So we took in all the free Strip entertainment we could handle (which wasn't much). We eschewed the seedy \$5.95 prime rib joints in favor of lunch at the Rainforest Café; a location we selected because it looked like the kind of larger-than-life dining experience one might only find in Las Vegas. Upon reading the back of the menu, we learned that they have a couple dozen locations, including one a quarter-mile from my office in Tysons Corner. Oh well. Anyway, the bright lights and big hotels were cool enough. But 20 hours were more than enough, and we were more than happy to get out when we did.

Hannah has taken to expressing her desire for a "new house." She feels our house is "too old" (she's right) and wants to move. Yeah, that could happen. Hannah also begins kindergarten next week. We hope she's ready. She can't read yet (Mom claims I could—I don't remember) but knows her alphabet, can count to twenty-something, and more or less knows how to write her name. She knows it's H-A-N-N-A-H, but usually writes it from right to left. Fortunately, with her name, it doesn't much matter. Just now, she flipped the board over and flew into a tirade following a tough loss to her mother in Candy Land, so we might need to work on some social skills. Hope Crystal's good at that.

Enjoyed seeing many of you.
Tim