

Dear Family:

28 October 2001

This letter begins with Lucy parked in front of the TV, wholly entranced by the Teletubbies. She is twice the Teletubby fan that Hannah ever was. For her part, Hannah now disavows ever having liked them. (And while I'm sure to have an archived letter or two that would impeach her testimony on this subject, I tend to doubt that such evidence would be deemed admissible. Grant, little help?) Hannah has turned her attention to building her repertory of knock knock jokes—all of which somehow manage to incorporate “poop” into the punch line. Example: Knock knock. Whose there? Poop. (End of joke.)

Last night was our annual ward “Trunk-or-Treat” party, in which grown-ups decorate and distribute candy from the trunks of their cars to any costumed children who happen by. Hannah was adorable in the white tiger costume she got from her great-aunt Coco. Lucy, in what will probably be a recurring theme throughout her childhood, wore the jack-o-lantern costume Hannah wore two years ago. The church party was an especially popular event this year as a surprising number of parents (including our next-door neighbors) feel that recent domestic events have made traditional door-to-door trick-or-treating prohibitively dangerous. At the risk of offending anyone who shares their sentiment, it is my considered view that these people are all idiots. (Though maybe it takes one to know one.) While I was in Dallas this week (see below), the mayor of Fort Worth all but cancelled Halloween in his city. The local news repeatedly pointed out that no anthrax has turned up anywhere in Texas (the dozen or so infected sites in and around Washington were largely ignored) but I guess you can't be too careful.

Crystal has begun volunteering every Friday in Hannah's classroom. She accomplishes this using a babysitting trade-off arrangement with a couple of other stay-at-home moms (remember when these used to be called “housewives?”) in the neighborhood. Both families go to church with us—one moved here recently for the husband's neurology residency at Walter Reed. Their son has lamented to me that his father works for the government “but not for the FBI, so we're not rich.” Our kind of people. Despite her mom being there, Hannah seems to be handling kindergarten okay. Her increasing confidence manifests itself in several ways, including her willingness to tell off fifth graders for using offensive language (“shut up,” “stupid” and so forth). She apparently has no qualms with “poop,” however.

Work took me several places this month. My first flights of the new terror-era took me to banks in Detroit, Chicago, Dallas and New Orleans that service FHA mortgages. While I didn't have time to see much of Detroit or Chicago, and there isn't anything to see in Dallas, I managed to find a little free time in New Orleans, and spent most of it in the French Quarter. I walked up and down Bourbon Street, mostly just so I could say I'd done it. It's probably more fun if you're drunk. A pleasant assortment of bars and strip clubs, with the occasional fine dining establishment—you can identify these by the signs in the window “Proper attire required: Gentlemen, no tank tops please.” The street's prevailing aroma is a curious amalgam of stale beer, human vomit, mule excrement, and...aw, too complicated—let's just say it smells like the back of a garbage truck and leave it at that. Other streets in the Quarter were less objectionable, and it was on these that I got my fill of Cajun: Beignets for breakfast, Po-boys for lunch, and remoulade, andouille, and alligator for dinner. The circuitous nature of my travels had me flying on a series of one-way tickets, which, it turns out, not only is more expensive, but also situates one squarely in a terrorist profile. As a result, I had the distinct privilege of having my checked luggage hand-searched at the ticket counter, and my carry-on bag hand-searched and my person patted-down at the gate (after clearing the security checkpoint overseen by M-16-toting National Guardsmen with everybody else.) Crystal's Note: The fact that he missed my birthday while eating alligator in New Orleans did not even get a mention. Tim's rebuttal: Ask her how she likes the new gas range she got for her birthday.

Well, there's the end of the page. We're all fine.

Love, Tim, Crystal, Hannah & Lucy