

Dear Family:

25 February 2002

To those of you who are familiar with my monthly writing habits (Dad) and may have spent last night checking e-mail every five minutes with breathless anticipation wondering when my monthly reflections would arrive, I apologize. You might blame the Olympic Winter Games, which prevented me from getting this or much of anything else done during the past two weeks. I tuned in to the Opening Ceremonies three Fridays ago thinking I would watch for five minutes then put in the movie I'd just rented.

I don't think I ever saw the movie.

Part of me stuck around just wanting to see the skating Little Red Riding Hood Child of Light fall on his can. But when that didn't happen I quickly became entranced by the whole spectacle and was amazed at the telegenicity of Rice-Eccles Stadium (which I had always thought of only as "Rice Stadium"—actually I had always thought of it as "that dump where the Utes play"). But it—like the rest of Utah—looked magnificent on TV. Plus the U.S. did well, which, I don't care what the experts say, is why NBC hit its ratings number. Ratings were up for the same reason that Washington Post circulation increases dramatically on days following a Redskins victory. In response to all the flak the Nietzsche Broadcasting Company takes for its America-centric coverage, allow me to speak for NBC's target demographic and explain that we have neither heard of nor care about any of these "sports;" we just like seeing our team do well. We could not care less which Swede or Finn wins the biathlon. Cross-country skiing is intensely boring, and unless we're in medal contention we don't care to see it. (Though we did love seeing the German-named Spaniard blow away the field, only to get stripped of his gold for doping.) We only care about the pot-smoker sports (snowboarding, freestyle skiing, etc.) because Americans medal in them. All this talk about appealing to the younger generation is pap. If the Koreans were winning, we wouldn't watch. This applies to every event. Anyway, the upshot is that I didn't turn the TV off for two weeks (except during figure skating...and, by the way, I loved watching America Junior get jobbed in the pairs competition, and was just as annoyed as the Russians when the duplicate golds were awarded...Multiple Gold Medals = Special Olympics, end of discussion). It was a most enjoyable respite from real news and real life (and is the main reason I don't have much to write about this month).

I was able to tear myself away from the television long enough to install GFCI protected electrical outlets in the kitchen and in one-third of our bathrooms, thus bringing that much of our house into the latter part of the twentieth century. We've also hired a firm to redo the shower in our "master" bathroom. (Those who have seen it know why it is necessary to place "master" in quotes. Though it adjoins our "master" bedroom, it is roughly the same size as our "master" "walk-in" closet.) Once this and some other work that we should be able to do ourselves is complete, it should at least look somewhat less objectionable.

I've practically forgotten about it, but I began this Black History Month by accompanying fifteen-year-old singing sensation Casey Alexander in his performance at the Washington, DC Temple Visitors' Center. Casey's credits include a number of operas, TV commercials and Carnegie Hall. (A resume that includes Carnegie Hall used to impress me more. Seems like everyone—including the Moorestown Madrigals—has done Carnegie Hall.) Anyway, he is a very mature fifteen, and, though his voice still has some developing to do, it was quite stirring at times. His program featured the standard federally mandated post-9/11 patriotic numbers followed by some cool black show tunes (e.g. "Old Man River") and gospel. Our one practice session was cut short when he had to rush home to sing the national anthem at a ceremony where his suburban Philadelphia high school was retiring Kobe Bryant's basketball jersey. But, in Mom's unbiased view, we came together okay. We were actually just the warm-up act for Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Douglass IV's re-enactment of the life and times of Frederick Douglass. All this was to celebrate the opening of a Visitors' Center exhibit featuring what was billed as one of the most comprehensive collections of African American artifacts (slave ship manifests, civil war stuff, Marian Anderson's first performance contract, an original letter written from prison by Martin Luther King, etc.) in existence. The collection owner—who apparently goes to that Mormon church—is bucking for it to become the core exhibit at the National Museum of African American History. The museum doesn't yet exist, but reportedly has received all the requisite Congressional appropriations. So it might actually get built—assuming there's still money left in the Federal Treasury following its raid by Senators Hatch and Bennett for Olympic-related pork.

Regular Wall Street Journal readers may have noticed my employer's series of full-page ads drawing attention to our first anniversary as a publicly traded entity. It boasted, in not so many words, of how we're not Arthur Andersen, and how we're now completely independent of our Big Five former parent. Not surprisingly the ads did not call attention to our stock performance. I don't want to make anyone jealous, but a mere thousand dollars invested in our stock at the IPO price would be worth a cool 958 bucks today. I feel fortunate to still have remunerative employment, but don't know how long my luck will last. Recent "workforce actions"—I love how our culture has more euphemisms for getting sacked than for dying—have me questioning the value of my office relationships. On the plus side, everyone is saying that we couldn't possibly get any leaner and that the recession is ebbing. And it's not as if the semi-monthly deposits into my bank account require dump trucks to transport or anything, so I could be fretting over nothing. (Although these letters would probably be a lot more interesting if I could write about my job picking up golf balls at the driving range.)

Love,
Tim