

Dear Family:

2 August 2002

Continuing my tradition of finding new and original places to begin writing family letters, this month's begins in the Pacific Ocean aboard a boat bound for Catalina. It turns out that Catalina, in addition to being a marginal salad dressing, is a small island 26 miles west of Los Angeles. I had no idea. Our boat, while big enough to seat, oh, 150 souls, is small enough that I feel every wave. I've never been seasick, and I suspect that the knot in my stomach owes more to my growing anxiety that there's a first time for everything than to any ailment likely to result in acute vomiting. But we'll have to see. We are making this arduous passage to Avalon in order to attend tomorrow's marriage of Crystal's brother Rick to Mimi George, both of Hollywood, CA. I expect everything will be perfect if we can just get there.

In a way we have spent the past week getting there. We flew into San Diego last Friday and have passed the intervening time doing Southern California with Crystal's Dad, his family, the Roland and Marci¹ family, and several of Crystal's California aunts, uncles and cousins. Our first non-work-related journey to the West Coast in seven years—our children's first ever—included trips to Balboa Park, La Jolla, SeaWorld (the kids'll never be impressed by the Baltimore Aquarium again), Coronado, and Disneyland. Crystal's uncle, who heads up SeaWorld's research facility, enhanced our enjoyment of that experience not only by providing free passes (though that would have been enough) but also by taking us on a tour of his labs and some other cool behind the scenes stuff. This was naturally of more interest to the adults in our group than to the children (particularly Hannah) who just wanted to see Shamu and had to be repeatedly hushed for loudly expressing their boredom. All week long we have enjoyed the hospitality of Crystal's great aunt Joan Matheke (pronounced "ma-TAY-key" in case you're reading this aloud over dinner) who has graciously allowed us to use her San Diego home as a base of operations for all these excursions.

August 3. The view out the window was too distracting for me to get more than two paragraphs written on the boat. We are now on Santa Catalina Island. It is Saturday morning and I am lying on my bed in our ocean-facing room on the morning after a tiring but fulfilling day that included a happy hour and the family dinner on the water preparatory to this evening's main event. We will shortly be out enjoying the idyllic scenery of one of the most beautiful places I've ever been. Rick described it last night as a Mediterranean Coney Island. That's probably right, but doesn't do it justice. If you can look past the overabundance of fat tourists clogging the narrow streets and gift shop after gift shop peddling an apparently endless supply of kitschy crap that for some reason doesn't seem so overpriced in this sun-splashed island environment, it's one of those places whose beauty can only be captured by a poet (or a really expensive camera). I am/have neither so I guess you're out of luck. Accessible only by boat or helicopter and with golf carts the only non-human-powered method of transportation available to non-residents, we had feared that the island might present an insurmountable challenge for our young yet large family. But, notwithstanding Lucy's defiance at nearly every juncture (we attribute this to severe sleep deprivation), we've somehow managed so far without incident.

August 4. So that's it. The wedding was perfect, the bride ravishing, the groom striking, the reception lovely, the outdoor country club setting opulent, the rabbi engaging and entertaining, and the band classy (the diametric opposite of your standard cheese ball South Jersey wedding deejay). Hannah and Lucy were mainstays on the dance floor and had a great time. Indeed we all did. This morning featured a brunch and some final wandering around before we all reluctantly made our way back to the docks. The boat ride home was considerably smoother. Having safely arrived back at Aunt Joan's we have started our preparations for tomorrow morning's long trip home. One might think that a cross-country flight would represent an ideal opportunity to knock out the monthly family letter. However, that would require wrestling the necessary hardware away from children who view the laptop computer as little more than a portable DVD player and game system. It's just not worth the trouble. Hence, all these piecemeal installments. So thus ends our family's ten-day Southern California adventure. All in all, I don't see how it could have gone much better.

Other things have happened this month. My July actually began and ended with palm trees as I started the month with a business trip to West Palm Beach, Florida. I came across plenty of morons and unwitting Pat Buchanan supporters but no hanging chads. We spent most of the Fourth with Coco, making an appearance at our pool's annual Independence Day picnic. This is the event at which Grant and I both medalled in the Big Splash Contest last year. This year it was too hot to stick around that long (seriously, it really was too hot to be at a pool party) so we took refuge in an air-conditioned movie theater and enjoyed "Lilo and Stitch," which was unusually entertaining for a Disney flick. That might sound like a lame way to celebrate the birth of our nation. At least we went out for the fireworks. The rest of the month is pretty much a blur at this point, but I'm fairly certain it involved daily trips to the pool (whose three-meter board was the subject of a recent Washington Post article from which we derive great pride). It seems like Mom and Dad paid a visit at some point in connection with a temple trip. I'm sure that was nice. We also celebrated Grant's birthday and Crystal organized yet another successful Pioneer Day picnic. These were all good things. Okay this paragraph stinks, but I'm too tired to do anything about it. Gotta love the good strong finish. Have a nice month.

Love, Tim, Crystal, Hannah, Lucy & Sophie

¹ Crystal's brother and sister-in-law