

Disclaimer: This is written on a Fast Sunday afternoon. As a result, I regrettably cannot be held responsible for any offensive comments that might be ascribed to hunger-impaired judgment. (It's a shame I don't have this excuse every month.)

Dear Family

1 September 2002

August ended for us as it began—on vacation. Different places, different people, same general idea. We kicked off the month at what amounted to a Kent family reunion in California (see last month's letter for details) during which I had it very politely (and repeatedly) explained to me how Hannah, Lucy and Sophie are all dead ringers for their mother, both today and as a child, and how ("no offense," some would add*) they really bear no resemblance to me whatsoever. The month ended, however, in West Virginia at a descendants-of-Bertram-C.-and-Christine-H.-Willis-plus-Colleen-Henrichsen (a succinct yet awkward way of referring to myself, my brothers, our parents, wives and children—and Aunt Coco) reunion during which it was pointed out that my children (particularly Sophie and Hannah) do, in fact, resemble me. My dear sister-in-law Jessica went so far as to say that Sophie looks "exactly" like me. This only goes to show that the views of my family are obviously more flattering to me than to my children. It would also seem to demonstrate that declarations of who-resembles-whom are somewhat subject to bias.

Whew. The preceding was a classic Tim Willis opening paragraph that required less than three sentences to go off on a tangent. Now, where was I? Ah, yes, the Willis family reunion in West Virginia. The Oglebay resort at which we stayed is discussed in some detail in the second paragraph of the 3/31/02 edition of Famlet™, but I do not expect anyone to remember that (or to actually be keeping a Famlet™ archive), so I'll rehash here. Nestled in the hills of Wheeling, WV (an absolute dump of a town—no offense) we were drawn to Oglebay partially for its setting, abundance of stuff to do, and proximity to Uncle Pete's Restaurant in downtown Wheeling, but mainly, I'd venture, for the availability of a six-bedroom cottage with a large common area, which permitted us all to be together. Basically a golf resort (we did a little of that) Oglebay provided us with a diversity of amusements, including a great pool, horseback riding, nature trails, a small zoo, and other things I'm doubtless forgetting. We also enjoyed significant lounge time and substantially swelling the ranks of the Wheeling Branch on Sunday.

It was a great week that frequently saw people spontaneously break into song—particularly a certain John Denver number that makes mention of West Virginia and country roads. It seemed to matter little that we traveled just about entirely on interstate highways. It was great having everyone together at the same time. Even though we had to leave a day and a half early to get Hannah to school, we had a splendid time and appreciate Mom and Dad's willingness to plan (and bankroll) the whole thing.

Hannah is now a full-fledged first grader at Forest Knolls Elementary School. We celebrated this by removing the training wheels from her bike. A newly-legislated cap of 17 students per class has resulted in considerably more first grade classes this year than there were kindergarten classes last year. There are two significant consequences of this: 1) Most of Hannah's kindergarten friends are not in her first grade class, and 2) The area behind the school is now littered with a plethora of modular temporary-looking (though probably permanent) classrooms. Hannah seems to be adapting well. She certainly isn't lacking in confidence—greeting every new dress with an enthusiastic, "I will look adorable in this." Sure enough. She continues to be traumatized by some of the "little" things, such as deciding between the Harry Potter and Barbie toothbrushes. She really wanted them both and literally loses sleep over not being able to keep the spurned choice "out of [her] mind" (her words).

Lucy is as strong-willed as ever. She's very particular about most things. This includes the way in which she is complimented. She is, for example, "cute" and takes offense at being referred to as "pretty" or "beautiful" or anything else. She also possesses an insatiable affinity for our bed. Her standard approach involves jumping in, pulling the covers up to her chin, letting out an audible sigh and declaring, "This bed is just my size." And then there's her favorite "guess-the-animal" game, in which the answer is almost always "flamingo," but the clue varies from day to day. For example, most recently, "I'm thinking of an animal with 5 long skinny legs, bright pink feathers and a very large hooked beak." It's actually just the number of legs that changes. When she gets annoyed by people correctly guessing "flamingo" the first time, she changes the answer (but not the clue, hence our family's recent discovery of the extremely rare long-legged, pink-feathered, hook-beaked elephant).

Sophie is now getting up on her hands and knees, rolls all over the place, and will almost certainly be crawling before the next edition of this letter. I'm looking at her now as she plays in her Exer-Saucer. She's smiling at me, is adorable, and, come to think of it, I think she does look like me.

Okay, that's it. Hope your summer was as pleasant as ours.

Love,

Tim, Crystal, and girls

* It strikes me as odd that the phrase "no offense" is employed almost exclusively as a lead-in or end note to something offensive (e.g. "No offense, but your mother's an idiot." Or, "Your family letters really stink, no offense.") The example cited above represents one of those rare cases in which offense was neither intended, nor implied, nor taken.