

Dear Family:

30 November 2002

We begin at 2 o'clock in the afternoon on the Saturday after Thanksgiving. We arrived home from New Jersey about an hour ago and, after unloading the car, I immediately took to the leaves for the dozenth or so time this year. Our lot is virtually clear, excepting only the new leaves that have blown into the front from our neighbors' yards, and I had left myself only the task of dealing with the large brown snowdrift-like leaf mounds I had piled against the house and the back fence. I had scarcely begun when the rain started. One of those bitterly cold and windy late-autumn rainstorms, I tried to work through it, but finally succumbed, so here I am, writing the family letter. Crystal and Sophie are napping, and the other girls are downstairs watching "Little Bear." The quietude is truly eerie.

Thanksgiving was nice. With Grant and Jen visiting her family and attending a wedding in Utah, and Matt and Andra hosting her sister's family from Arlington, we were a small group consisting only of Mom, Dad, Peter, Coco, Nancy Muller and the five of us. Nancy is a member of Mom and Dad's ward, who, in addition to being very kind, I learned, is the mother of Andrew Muller, my tent-mate at the LDS Scout Encampment at Letchworth—by Hill Cumorah—in 1984. So there. Then, yesterday morning, we, sans kids, took in the new Harry Potter movie. Hannah, who, against everyone's better judgment, was dead set on joining the party, opted out at the last moment to spend some time with her cousin, Anika. Hannah's desire to go was a little surprising for a girl who needs to cover her eyes during the more intense sequences of "Toy Story 2," but might be explained by her affinity for the first Potter flick, which, while good, is decidedly more benign. We finished off the day at Matt and Andra's, taking a tour of their new residence—a very comfortable Moorestown-y saltbox home—and spending a pleasant couple of hours (pleasant notwithstanding the nine children in the house) becoming re-acquainted with Andra's sister, Renée, and her family.

We spent last Saturday morning downtown with Coco at the annual Help the Homeless Walkathon, of which, my employer, Fannie Mae, and its philanthropic subsidiary, The Fannie Mae Foundation, are the main sponsors. It was cold, but Hannah, Lucy and Sophie handled the 5K walk around Capitol Hill and the National Mall with only occasional whining, mostly thanks to Crystal's kickin' double jogging stroller and infant backpack. (Which is to say, the kids didn't do a lot of walking.) We skipped most of the post-walk hoopla, electing instead to amble a couple of blocks over to the National Museum of Natural History, where Hannah can't get enough of the dinosaur bones. In this town where the stuff that isn't free can be very expensive indeed, we very much enjoy the Smithsonian.

Hannah continues to do well at school. She has really taken to writing on her own and often cranks out pages of musings at a time. While she isn't likely to win any spelling bees (this year), it pleases us to see her so given to this form of expression. We hope it sticks. She also enjoys math and music, but not PE.

Lucy remains fiercely independent, and ever so sweet. Hers is a refined palate, and she rejects most traditional American dishes in favor of such popular ethnic staples as Kung Pao Chicken and Purple-Lollipop-Dipped-In-Spaghetti-Sauce. Offering her unapproved menu items—or disappointing her in any other way—is regularly met with her standard complaint: "You broke my heart." One particularly egregious error on the part of her mother caused her to declare that her heart was broken into little pieces and that they were stuck in the mud. She's very particular about wardrobe, preferring dresses and skirts and absolutely refusing to wear pants that don't have flowers on them. In Lucy's estimation, non-floral pants, including jeans, "are ugly," make her "look like a boy," and, of course, "break [her] heart." I guess wanting to look like a girl is a good thing—I mean, assuming one actually is a girl.

Sophie is crawling all over the place and would very much like to be walking. She pulls herself up on anything that is available. This is typically followed the telling hollow-sounding "clunk" characteristic only of a human head (or perhaps a cantaloupe) striking a hardwood floor. She is increasingly animated and her smile lights up the room.

We continue to survive and are happy. We wish you a joyful holiday season.

Love,
Tim, Crystal, Hannah, Lucy & Sophie