

Dear Family:

27 January 2003

So ends another month featuring the kind of fun that can only be had living with people who have no concept of life without the Internet, cell phones, satellite TV and digital photography, but who cannot be dissuaded from the view that, in assessing science's greatest contributions to civilization, nothing can rival the almighty shrinky-dink.

We rang in the New Year with Roland, Marci, Noah and Emma Kent in their brand new Suffolk, VA home. Suffolk is located among a cluster of scenic little towns in the Norfolk/Virginia Beach corridor commonly referred to as Hampton Roads, where most everyone, it would seem, is affiliated in some way with the Navy and where you can actually get a really nice house for well under half-a-million bucks (not that we're jealous or anything—wait, yes we are). Though the January weather was not conducive to water sports (their really, really nice house—and ski boat—front a navigable river) we still passed a very pleasant and relaxing couple of days. We very much enjoy these visits even though on each drive home we can count on Hannah to complain about 1) the length of the drive (which is less than 3 hours), 2) the extent to which she misses her cousin, Noah, 3) how she's tired of our old house and wants a new one, and 4) her intense desire for a dog (like Noah's). But we'll probably endure it all again when the weather gets nice after Roland has completed his flight surgery training because we like them all (and their boat) so much.

In our continuing quest to join the ranks of over-scheduled American families, we have re-enrolled Hannah and started Lucy in dance lessons. Lucy's class focuses solely on ballet, while Hannah's combines ballet, tap and jazz (presumably in the theory that something will stick). Lucy also attends a weekly art class with Abby, and Crystal has started guitar lessons. I just go to work (and occasionally stink up the basketball court).

Our spur-of-the-moment family drive into town last weekend was quickly derailed by a throng of anti-war demonstrators exercising their self-proclaimed constitutional right to jaywalk, sit in the street, demolish police barriers, and side with the French. (Of course, if the U. S. had France's war record, I suppose we wouldn't be advocating hostilities either.) For the record, I'm not exactly sure where I stand on the impending Iraqi conflict, and it suffices me to say that I'm glad it isn't my call. But I generally have difficulty sympathizing with any position whose most outspoken champions are Ted Kennedy, Martin Sheen, Janeane Garofalo and a bunch of obnoxious hooligans who put a crimp in my weekend plans. So, anyway, we were forced to divert short of the National Mall, electing instead to cross over into Arlington where we took the girls to the Cemetery for the first time. We nearly froze to death, but it was nice enough. Next time we'll go back to taking Metro.

Hannah has started asking the tough questions. To wit: "Daddy, If Heavenly Father is good, how come there are bad people?" My initial inclination was to explain to her that philosophers have been debating her question for as long as there have been philosophers. Instead I offered the somewhat lame standard Sunday School line about people being free to make choices. I think that satisfied her. But while I am comfortable with this response, and believe it to be doctrinally accurate, I wonder how many years it will be before she thinks about it some more and realizes that it doesn't really fully address her question. Maybe I'll have figured it out by then.

In church today I was officially relieved of my duties as primary pianist; a position to which I was never formally called, but where I had been serving "on an interim basis" for the past five years (under three different bishops and four primary presidents). It saddens me to leave. I will miss the children (particularly Hannah, whose progression through the junior primary ranks I've witnessed firsthand, and Lucy, who is now a Sunbeam) and have grown accustomed to not having to endure priesthood meeting every week.

My new job, which I took in part because I didn't want to travel so much, took me on a week-long swing to visit Fannie Mae lenders in Phoenix and the San Francisco Bay Area this month. There are worse places to be in January. This came on the heels of a month that featured similar trips to Columbia, SC and Denver. (I realize I have family that I didn't bother to look up in at least two of these places. Sorry. I didn't have a lot of goof-off time.) I'm told that this much travel is somewhat anomalous, but even if it isn't, the fact remains that I actually kind of enjoy my job, and two trips a month really isn't all that bad. (Particularly after having been a consultant.)

We hope this finds you warmer than us.

Love,

Tim, Crystal, Hannah, Lucy & Sophie