

Dear Family,

31 August 2003

This Sabbath day of rest bisects a three-day weekend that otherwise would be entirely dedicated to overhauling our microscopic master bathroom. Yesterday saw the removal of all the old fixtures, painting the walls, re-tiling the floor, and the always-exciting adventure that is putting in a new toilet. Grouting, caulking, and the installation of a new pedestal sink, medicine cabinet and light fixture are all on tomorrow's docket. It ought to be beautiful and figures to come in at roughly one-eighth of what it cost us to have a contractor re-do the shower in the same bathroom a couple of years ago. (This calculation assumes, of course, that my time has no value and that we don't take into account the hundreds of dollars in swear jar contributions that accrued during yesterday's activities and the hundreds more that I'm certain to rack up tomorrow.)

But, alas, my time does have value. And now that I'm teaching seminary five mornings per week, its value is very much at a premium. In fact, I don't really have time to be writing this letter, as I should be preparing my lessons for next week. My class consists of a half-dozen or so kids from my ward plus anywhere from six to ten (or more) from the Spanish-speaking Glenmont Branch, which meets in our building. (The Spanish-speakers all speak English, too—in most cases better than their parents.) The students represent all four grades at several area high schools. The first day of class was to have been this past Wednesday. But severe thunderstorms the day before knocked out power to the church, leaving a bishopric member and me to turn away one distressed minivan after another as each pulled into the parking lot at or around 6:00 a.m. Classes on Thursday and Friday were decently attended, but I haven't yet found any kind of teaching rhythm. There'll be plenty of time for that, I suppose. My alarm is set for 4:45, but I've been so keyed up and nervous that I've awakened before it each morning. (I expect that'll change.) My judgment was so impaired from sleep deprivation by the end of the week that Howard Dean was actually starting to make sense to me. Bada-bing! But seriously, folks, if it gets too bad, I may have to start writing Hollywood-like "best of" clip job letters, in which I'll just cut and paste material from previous episodes of *Famlet* and call it the monthly offering.

Dad's letter summarized our family reunion (everyone but Grant) trip to Rocky Acre Farm very efficiently in a succinct 8-line paragraph. Here's my take: Rocky Acre Farm is a family-oriented Bed & Breakfast located in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, which is home to a large Mennonite population and a certain number of the Mennonites' better-known and more romanticized splinter group, the Amish. The area is commonly known as Pennsylvania Dutch country (or, if you're a member of Crystal's family, "Amish Dutch Country"). Pick whichever you want; the closest thing to a Dutch person there was Aunt Andra (née Wolthuis). Those who know me best know that I'm not the world's foremost fan of Pennsylvania Dutch country, where roughly 3 trillion tourists flock every year to take buggy rides from non-Amish people in Amish garb, eat in crummy restaurants, and pay exorbitant sums for quilts and other wares purportedly crafted by "actual Amish people." That said, I actually enjoyed myself very much. Rocky Acre Farm is, well, a farm, complete with cows and all the attendant smells, etc. But I might have actually experienced a watershed moment in which I actually had fun simply by virtue of watching my children have fun. There was something gratifying about seeing them so excitedly sprint with their baskets to the chicken coop to collect the eggs, or to ride the pony, or to milk the cows. I even stopped noticing the smell by the third day. It wasn't all about the kids, though. Andrew and I had fun racing the golf carts (while our wives were in town looking at expensive quilts) and Thursday night's dinner with an "actual Amish family" was certainly memorable. (The food was fresh, but, for the most part, forgettable. Eating in a dark, non-Air Conditioned, non-Cable TV-equipped Amish farmhouse was memorable.)

A single 17-line paragraph (albeit with smaller font and narrower margins than Dad's). Still, not bad for me.

The Rocky Acre Farm excursion was actually the second half of a week that started first at Matt and Andra's, then at Mom & Dad's house and included a day-trip to Sesame Place with the girls plus Uncle Pete and Uncle Andrew. Bringing Pete turned out to be a very good call as his disability entitled him to wear a special wristband permitting him (and his friends) to cut to the front of any line. Next year, I think we'll take Pete to Disney World.

Hannah's getting settled into second grade. At the moment she's playing dolls with Lucy, and I've just noticed that Hannah's affecting a British accent. I think that's new. I'm going to have to look in to see what that's all about. Lucy starts pre-school next week. More on that next month. (That is, assuming I don't write a "best of" letter.)

Best to all of you.

Love,
Tim