

Dear Family,

26 October 2003

I've decided it's probably best to resist the urge to begin this month's letter by taking a swipe at California's retarded electorate. So I will.

Friday was Crystal's birthday. She got a PDA (leaving me as the last living American not to own one. I wear this distinction proudly.) She also got that Indiana Jones trilogy on DVD she'd been wanting for so long...not at all unlike the highly anticipated porcelain butter dish I got for Christmas two years ago. We celebrated the day—this was her idea—by attending the Friday evening so-called “first session” of a long stake conference weekend on the seventh floor of the temple in what some call the “priesthood room” and others call the “assembly room.” There was a time when the rarity of such sessions made them kind of a big deal. Now that we have them practically every stake conference I fear they may have become a little ho-hum, but that's just me. Our stake overwhelmed the ensuing English endowment session, so Crystal and I were overflowed into the Spanish session. Want to see something weird? Walk into a room with Latins and Anglos, where the *Anglos* are the ones asking for headsets. I switched my translator over the French channel, and probably listened to the presentation more intently than I had in years. (Amazingly, I'd never heard the endowment in my mission language before, and I was surprised to learn that the word “enmity” would seem to be Old French and that the French do in fact have words for “armies” and “navies.”) Anyway, we had more stake conference last night, so I figure we'll have our real celebration four months from now when Crystal officially cracks the 1/3-century mark. (We did have a cake yesterday, and she thanks everyone who sent cards.)

Stake Conference will wrap with the Sunday session a little later this morning, when it is anticipated that I will provide organ accompaniment for the congregational hymns and piano accompaniment for one of the choir numbers: “Behold, God the Lord Passed By” from Mendelssohn's *Elijah*.

The choir performing at conference is, once again, the Washington Family Theatre Singers, in which Crystal and I sing and I am one of three accompanists. We performed at the Visitors' Center last Saturday night in a program that included seven minutes of talking by me. I performed phenomenally. (I can say that because no one showed up and can refute it—except for Crystal, who.... The place was about one-tenth full, which, we were told, is good for a Saturday night.) We also saw the traveling Dead Sea Scrolls exhibit on display there. That *was* pretty cool.

All this talk about me has probably distracted you from the highlight of the month, which was Lucy's fourth birthday and sequence of “princess parties.” She had been counting the days literally since August. (Do you have ANY idea how long the August-to-October stretch is to a 3-year old? Or to her parents? Three months of at least once-daily conversations beginning with “Let's talk about my princess party...” We are not looking forward to planning this child's wedding.) The first such party took place in Moorestown at Grandma and Grandpa's house on the weekend of Lucy's actual birthday. (We had driven up to watch General Conference with them.) Grandma greeted us at the entrance to the driveway with helium-filled balloons and all manner of other princess stuff. The next Saturday featured a second princess party at our house attended by 8 of Lucy's closest gift-bearing friends, plus family, including Coco, Grant and Jen. I continue to be amazed by Crystal's party-planning prowess (not to mention Coco's willingness to get wrapped up in such chaos).

Lucy is all about being the princess (which I'm okay with only because I recognize what that makes me.) Hannah and Lucy often take turns making up stories and poems to tell one another. Lucy's poetry is almost always a variation of some Disney-fied princess fairy-tale and she is highly intolerant of storytelling outside that genre. One of Hannah's recent stories, which began: “Once upon a time, there was a boy in the first grade...” , was quickly interrupted by Lucy demanding that the tale be rendered “more princessy.”

On the seminary front, I'm happy to report that I actually seem to have been able to keep my students' attention so far (for the most part). I attribute this mainly to the material: namely the book of Genesis, including what I've come to dub the Circumcision-Sodomy-Incest (or “CSI”) Corridor. If nothing else, it keeps everyone awake. Discussions on circumcision prompted some uncharacteristic class participation (not to mention hilarious lines of questioning) from my Latin boys, most of whom I suspect are not circumcised. We finished Genesis this week and I hope to have similar fun in Exodus. But I honestly don't see how I'll be able to keep even my own attention in Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. I have one student (I'll call him Frank H., because that's his name) whom I used to be able to count on to keep his head on the desk throughout class. That changed this week when he became my first student to pull out a PDA during class. This prompted from me every teacher's favorite draconian threat: something like, “Unless you're looking at Genesis 48 on that, it's mine.” So it showed it to me. Sure enough, Genesis 48, and for the past two days he's actually been following along and opening his mouth occasionally. I figure that'll last at least until the novelty of the toy wears off...or until we hit Leviticus, whichever's first.

I'm not sure whether to feel relieved about the outcome of Dad's cardiac catheterization procedure. The resultant diagnosis, “cardiomyopathy,” sounds to the cynic in me like a doctor saying, “I don't really know what's going on here, but let's throw some drugs at it.” I *am* relieved that it's not the result of any arterial blockage and that it appears to be treatable without further surgery.

Hope all of your hearts are well.

Love,  
Tim