

Dear Family,

4 January 2004

Well, it's all over. The icicle lights are down. The presents are mostly put away. The tree and some lingering interior decorations are still up, but shouldn't be by the end of family home evening tomorrow. And the relatives are all gone. It's kind of depressing, really, and not just because I have to go back to work tomorrow (though that's probably part of it. I say I like my job, but I'd still just as soon not go.) I'm also wondering how long it'll take me to find my seminary rhythm again.

The last relatives to say good-bye were members of Crystal's father's family (him, plus wife Karel and daughters Brenna and Tawny). In what one might consider training for Brenna's mission to Honduras, which begins in two-and-a-half weeks, they all spent two nights in our third-world-like basement. We enjoyed having them here, and they claim to have had a good time as well. This came at the end of a week-long East Coast swing that took them from Baltimore to North Carolina's Outer Banks (Kitty Hawk, etc.) and back.

We initially caught up with them on New Year's Eve at Roland and Marci's substantial Suffolk, Virginia home, which somehow seems to get bigger each time we visit. It was nice seeing Roland, who spent most of December home from Diego Garcia. As usual, Hannah and Noah spent most of their time together fighting over whose turn it was on the X-Box, or Nintendo 64, or whatever (which is fascinating given how their house has more video game systems and TVs than my house has rooms). New Year's Day featured a plunge by Roland, Crystal, Tawny, and I'm not sure how many other idiots into the river abutting the backyard. It was quite balmy for January—temps might have reached the 60s—but I still wussed out and declined to participate. (I wasn't feeling well...or stupid. Somehow I don't think the water temperature was anywhere near 60.)

Christmas was good. It began with my traditional Christmas Eve work day (two hours in the office), followed by our not-so-traditional Christmas Eve family lunch at Red Lobster, followed by a traditionally frantic Christmas Eve afternoon, followed by Christmas Eve dinner at our house with Grant, Jen, Abby and Alex, complete with gingerbread house making, Yule log eating, and a token attempt at "real story of Christmas" reading. It all worked out okay, I guess. Maybe next year we'll do it all over again at Grant and Jen's big new house (which we've all agreed will be in Washington's Maryland—rather than Virginia—suburbs).

Christmas morning brought new bikes for Hannah and Lucy, plus little else from us. Hannah, who is now hip to the whole Santa scene, dispensed with any pretense and just thanked us for everything. After opening the mountain of presents shipped in by Crystal's faraway relatives we made the traditional late Christmas morning drive up to Moorestown for Christmas dinner (and more present-opening) at Grandma Christine's house. (Grandpa lives there, too, but even he acknowledges that it isn't really his house.) We were joined there by Coco, Matt and Andra's family (we got our first glimpse of baby Jackie) and some missionaries.

We had to cut our Christmas visit to New Jersey short in order to be home in time to sing with the Washington Family Theatre Singers to two uncharacteristically packed houses at the Washington Temple Visitors' Center. Grant and Jen were actually turned away when they didn't arrive early enough. But Mom, Dad, Pete and Coco made it and it was fun. We're also glad it's over.

Finally, I suppose it bears mentioning that last night we finally bit the bullet and picked up a new 2004 Toyota Sienna (a large minivan), thus ending the era of our pimping around in my late grandparents' big honkin' Buick LeSabre. The story behind this purchase is actually quite amusing and could fill several Famlets, but, alas, I'm out of room. Maybe next letter. But probably not.

I'll try and do better next month.

Love,
Tim