

Dear Family,

31 January 2004

It's a new year! And you know what that means—another exciting statement of account from Western National Trust Company for the “Willis Family Granchildren's Trust” (sic)—a monument to conservative investing that wouldn't lose value if we had three 9/11's this year. I actually perused through my statement for once and couldn't help but notice that nearly half the fund is tied up in Fannie Mae securities (which are classified on the statement as “Government Obligations” even though they are not government obligations and carry no government guarantee of any kind). That's okay, though. I'm sure all my cousins will sleep better knowing I feel newly incited to do everything possible to keep my employer from going under.

This was the month for breaking in the new minivan. We took the odometer over the thousand-mile mark, with most of them coming last weekend, which began with a 200-mile drive down to Suffolk, VA, where we picked up cousin Noah and proceeded nearly 100 miles further south to Kitty Hawk, NC. It was way too cold to walk the beach, but the Wright Brothers memorial was entertainment enough. We spent Saturday afternoon there, and Sunday with Marci, Noah and Emma at their spacious Suffolk estate.

We left earlier than we had planned on Monday morning, chased by a wintry mix that dropped three inches of snow and ice on southern Virginia (a lot for them) and about six inches on Washington (a lot for us). We still have almost all of it as temperatures have yet to crack freezing for any meaningful period. The net result was no school (and, by extension, no seminary) until Thursday, when I had the privilege of shoveling out a long narrow path from the parking lot to the church door at 5:50 am (followed by crank calls by me to the physical facilities representative at 5:56, 5:57 and 5:59 am). (Not really. But I thought about it at all those times.)

All this was preceded two weeks earlier by a family daytrip to Annapolis. We feel special to be counted among that distinguished group of Americans for whom the national capital is a local call, but whose state capital is long-distance. Coco came along (we had plenty of room, after all) and we took our first ever tour of the Maryland State House and learned all kinds of exciting trivia/family letter fodder. I love you, Aunt Lou Jean, and the rest of this paragraph is for you: Maryland's is the oldest functioning state house in America. It was for a time the country's highest building. For a very brief period in seventeen eighty-something, it served as the national capitol and was the site of General George Washington's resigning his commission before the Continental Congress. The flags atop it fly from a genuine Benjamin Franklin lightning rod. That's all I can remember. For more details you'll have to come and visit.

It's been really cold. Apart from these and a couple of trips to the mall and/or Target, we haven't gotten out much.

Of course the real hero of these journeys hasn't been the new van per se so much as the new van's on-board DVD player. To quote Hannah after the torturous 4-hour drive home from Noah's through the snow: “That seemed like 2 minutes.” Wireless headphones for the kids in the back mean the grown-ups in the front don't have to listen to them watch repeated showings of *The Wizard of Oz*, *Lady and the Tramp*, *Sleeping Beauty* and other crappy Disney favorites. Yep. Worth every dime.

Speaking of which, I have to give a lesson on financial management to the High Priests group tomorrow, which, based on that last sentence, I'm clearly not prepared for. I'm not a High Priest (I work for a living) so I'm not really sure how I got roped into this. But there you are. Gotta get to work. Have a great month.

Love,
Tim