

Dear Family,

28 February 2004

It's the last weekend of February and we are currently en route to visit Tim's parents. Crystal's doing the typing, though the contents of this letter are already being liberally discussed. This letter may be the first to be truly collaborative; yet another opportunity brought to us as a direct benefit of the on-board DVD player. Even with *Piglet's Big Movie* going in the back, life is good (and quiet). Tim took Hannah to the National Building Museum this morning because she'll be missing her class field trip there on Monday as a result of this trip. It sounds like they had a good time, but Tim is very tired as this comes on the heels of a two-day trip to Monroe, Louisiana. It was a business trip, the only details of which that were important enough to be shared involved some really good Cajun food. One of the culinary highpoints of the trip was a converted gas station where one buys boiled crawfish ("mud bugs" to the initiated) in three-, five-, and ten-pound increments. Then you plopp your box down on a picnic table and go to. Add to that getting re-acquainted with authentic gumbo, boudin blanc, pig po boys and shrimp in all its spiciest forms and Tim's good to go for a while. A former seminary teacher with two children in Tim's seminary class substituted for him while he was gone and will fill in on Monday, too. He has every confidence in her ability, and I'm finding myself with a newfound understanding of what the job entails, as I was recently enlisted as a last-minute sub.

A recent wave of family illness started early in the month on the morning of Ward Conference. Amidst the pre-church hubbub, Lucy's claims of a tummy ache were initially dismissed as an attempt to get out of going to church. But it didn't take her long to prove herself sincere by throwing up repeatedly. It broke Tim's heart to have to stay home with her and miss "the most painful 90 minutes on the Mormon calendar" (his assessment of most annual Ward Conference sessions). And by the time the rest of us got home from church, Daddy had had the opportunity to observe that only Lucy could be stubborn enough to throw a series of fits, claiming, after a morning during which she threw up five times (unable even to hold water down) that she was not sick. (This is the same girl who finds the concept of death so distasteful, she has decreed that neither she, nor anyone who loves her is to be permitted to die—ever. She insists on things like this so long and so loudly that I eventually just say, "Okay, fine." Trying to explain that Jesus made it possible for all of us to be resurrected and live again hasn't really done anything to allay her concern, so I'm hoping you'll all just cooperate by complying with Lucy's moratorium on death until further notice.) Fortunately, her illness was short-lived. Monday night Hannah followed suit, to be followed by Dad at 3:00 a.m., thus preparing the way for me to have the opportunity to discuss King David's adultery with a bunch of high school students. By the end of class I was feeling sick enough that I was just hoping to make it home, where I found Sophie had retched in her crib. Though no longer sick, Lucy still spent the day in misery, bemoaning the fact that—with both her parents glued to the bed—there was "no one to take care of" her. Of course the following week she was sick again, this time with a "head egg" (a headache) and high fever for several days. Mom hasn't gotten a lot done this month.

Between Lucy's bouts with illness, we celebrated Valentine's Day with a family trip to Hershey, Pennsylvania. This was partially just Tim's looking for excuses to go on daytrips with the new car (a two-hour drive, it was the car's first journey north of the Mason-Dixon Line) but it seemed like the perfect place to celebrate the holiday ostensibly invented as a reason for people to buy large boxes of chocolate. We did the Chocolate World tour and show (a little hokey, we'd done it all before, but our crew is fairly easily entertained). At a notch above "Podunk," and one below "real town," Hershey is just the right size to have an outlet mall, where we rounded out the day before heading home.

2 March 2004

I'm getting back to this letter now that we're in the car on the way home from Grandma and Grandpa's house. This time the kids are watching *Monsters, Inc.* We had a very enjoyable time visiting with Tim's parents and Pete and seeing Matt and Andra and their children. As the girls get a little older it seems like it's getting easier to just let them go and have a good time together. We're not having to intervene to smooth over ruffled feathers and soothe hurt feelings quite as often. Unfortunately, Hannah came down with some kind of illness Monday morning just as we were setting off on a trip to the Franklin Institute. She started complaining of a slight stomachache in the morning, but still really wanted to go to the museum, so we thought we'd try it. She lasted just long enough to get through the front door and then rapidly started to unravel. She ended up sitting on a bench looking kind of gray, and watching her sister and cousins play with the interactive exhibits in the most child-friendly part of the museum. Then we went to an early planetarium show, learned how to find Mars in the night sky, and beat a path on out of there. We got Anika and her family home in time to get her to afternoon kindergarten (she was going to play hooky with us) and took Hannah back to Grandma's to spend the rest of the day bundled up on the sofa.

After a mostly nice weekend we're headed back home to reality. Tim has to pick up his seminary keys from his sub and get a lesson prepared for tomorrow. Then we both have to vote in Maryland's primary, which is the reason that school is closed today and why we were able to justify skipping school Monday for this trip.

I'm very tired due to the fact that the portable crib at Grandma's house has proved no match for Sophie. She can and will get out of it whenever the notion strikes her and last night she chose to spend many hours keeping me from sleeping. Getting back to reality may be unpleasant in some ways, but I'm really looking forward to getting back to Sophie's crib and the little tent we've put on top of it to keep her in.

We hope this finds you well.

Love,
Crystal, Tim et al