



Dear Family:

So I've been sitting on this plane that's taking me from Washington to Seattle for the better part of an hour just staring at a blank screen, trying to think of something to write. But nothing's coming to me. Maybe there's something about not seeing one's family for a month that makes writing a family letter especially problematic. But now my battery's running low and I've got to get something down, even if it's nothing more than what a hard time I'm having getting started. I glance around the cabin for inspiration. I'm in a crappy middle seat (at least it's in the exit row) on some obscure carrier called "Alaska Airlines." Seriously, that's what it's called. An airline actually chose to name itself after the nation's only third-world state (at least the only one that doesn't border the Gulf of Mexico—and would you even consider boarding anything called "Mississippi Airlines?"). As if the name doesn't connote enough of a lack of seriousness, the plane actually has this big dopey-looking Eskimo painted on the tail that just screams, "We are a joke." Clearly, Washington-Dulles isn't a hub for these guys. (I think they have one flight a day in and out.) And that causes a real problem when they screw something up (like they did this morning by assigning seat 23D both to me and to some crotchety old bag who got there first. With virtually no local staff to fix the problem, I was stuck holding my bags in the aft galley while flight attendants waited to see what seats would be available. (My repeated observations that a number of first class seats were unoccupied went unheeded.)

Clearly, a month away from the people I love the most has transformed me (transformed me?) into a very bitter man. At least I have been able to ascertain from almost daily conversations that the girls have had a very good time visiting their maternal grandparents with their mommy. Hannah reportedly made great strides with her freestyle breathing and her now-legal breaststroke kick as a temporary member of Grandma Carolyn's swim team. Lucy, despite frequent bouts with illness, seems to have had a good time. And Sophie seems to be doing better after having lost one of her front teeth—the result of a brusque encounter with a concrete walkway. I am looking forward to seeing all of them in just a few more hours.

My month, which was doubtless far less eventful than theirs—a fact that won't preclude my devoting the rest of this letter to it—was an exercise in getting away from the construction zone that is my house as often as possible. The construction, since you asked, is about a week behind schedule, and the house probably won't be ready for us when we return next Thursday. As of oh-dark-thirty this morning when I left, the drywall was mostly sanded, the new flooring was mostly down, and a truckload of new kitchen cabinets and appliances was piled in the new dining room

(formerly Hannah's and Lucy's bedroom) just waiting for someone to install them in the kitchen. But there's also still a lot of finishing to do. And as I was falling asleep in the basement last night sometime around 11:00 I could still faintly hear the miter saw going in my new bedroom two floors up as the contractor, who's trying to join his own family on vacation, toiled away on doors and baseboards until I don't know how late.

I'm very grateful to so many of you who made this a reasonably pleasant month for me. I think especially of Grant and Jen, who probably had me over for dinner an average of twice a week. They even invited me to join Mattt, Andra and them at Rockville's 19<sup>th</sup> annual 8K race. Displaying a bewildering lack of judgment that I can only blame on loneliness—I hadn't run any distance in years, and don't think I'd ever run 8 kilometers before in my life—I plunked down my 25 bucks and said, "What the [heck]." I "trained" (i.e., I ran a couple of times) during the 5 days leading up to the race, and completed the course in a blistering 56 minutes 50 seconds—slower than 1,128 of the 1,190 men and 788 of the 915 women who ran the race. Among the people who finished way, way ahead of me (besides Grant, Jen, and Andra, who were completely out of sight long before the first mile marker) were seven septuagenarians, and—I kid you not—one Ms. Blair Jones of Washington, DC (age 60). If you don't believe me, the results are posted online [here](#). There was something about getting creamed by a 60-year-old woman that prompted me to begin an early-morning running regimen (which has been very easy to maintain in the absence of my family, and has little hope of continuing once seminary resumes).

My month also included two weekend trips to Moorestown. Pete showed little interest in seeing me without Hannah, Lucy and Sophie, and he actually got mad at me when I showed up alone for the second time. "Where are the girls?" he kept demanding. He relented a little when I assured him that I'd have them with me next time.

One of these trips was on the 24<sup>th</sup> of July, which coincidentally was chosen for something called "Mormon Day at the Phillies" and provided a great excuse to visit the Phillies' charming new Camden Yards-esque ballpark. The national anthem was performed by a choir of elders from the Philadelphia mission who sounded just great—the product of a church that teaches its children to sing, whether they like it or not. Eagles head coach Andy Reid, possibly the region's best known member of the Church, threw out the first pitch...which bounced in the dirt. True to Philadelphia form, a highly vocal contingent booed him off the field while breaking into a drunken rendition of "Fly, Eagles, Fly." Man, I love Philly fans.

The captain just announced that we're now crossing the North Dakota/Montana border, and all I can think about is how, if the plane goes down here, they might never find us. If you get this, it means we made it okay. Hope this finds you well.

Love,  
T, C, H, L & S

100 HANNES STREET  
SILVER SPRING, MARYLAND 20901