

Dear Family:

I should begin by extending warmest congratulations to my cousin Jenny Willis (now Jenny Miller, I suppose) for pulling off what must be one of the few successful Temple elopements in Mormon history. (Our Cannon great-grandparents were serenaded by the Tabernacle Choir at their wedding reception. Jenny apparently preferred the opposite extreme.) I really shouldn't categorize it as an elopement since parents and siblings apparently knew about it and even attended, but it's pretty cool all the same. We wish Jenny and John well and continue to hope and pray that smart people will be able to figure out and fix her mysterious ailment (the real reason for the quiet wedding).

Okay, so we left off last month with my having just arrived in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. There I joined Crystal and the girls, who had flown out four weeks earlier. We spent a few days in Coeur d'Alene (including one on the boat) with Grandma and Grandpa Kent and a couple more days in Wenatchee, Washington with Grandma Carolyn and Grandpa Pat. (The naming convention is kind of complicated. Grandma Carolyn is Crystal's mother and Grandpa Kent is her dad. Having three sets of grandparents must be confusing, but our kids are pretty bright.) Hannah was enamored with Wenatchee's aptly named "Saddle Rock" mountain behind Grandma's house, which she climbed twice. And I was enamored with Wenatchee's scenic Highlander Golf Club. Overlooking the Columbia River, it's one of those swanky courses where they make you wear a collared shirt—the kind of place I'd be too cheap to play if Grandpa Pat weren't paying. The kids had a great time in both places, and everything was going just swell...

...until we had to leave. The five of us flew home together on a red-eye out of Seattle that put us back into Dulles just before 7:00 on a Thursday morning. We arrived home to find our house not too much different from how I'd left it six days earlier—though considerably different from how Crystal and the girls had left it 5 weeks earlier. Either way, only the basement was inhabitable. So we suffered through that for a day and a half before giving up and driving to New Jersey on Friday afternoon—thus allowing the girls to complete the grandparent trifecta, visiting the homes of all three sets within a five-day span.

We anticipated staying for a long weekend, certainly not planning to leave any later than Tuesday. But word came from Maryland of more construction delays, and Grandma Christine and Grandpa (I'm not sure what his name is to the girls these days—Hannah and Lucy sometimes refer to him as "Grandpa Pete's-

Dad", and Sophie calls him "Elmo") wound up hosting us all week, right up until we left for West Virginia the following Saturday.

I'm too lazy to look back at what I wrote two years ago about Wheeling, West Virginia and Oglebay, but I'd imagine it closely resembles what I'll write here. It may not be entirely fair, but West Virginia is best known for two things: rugged beauty and inbreeding. In fact, every Wyoming joke you've ever heard is probably just a recycled West Virginia joke. Wheeling, whose downtown buildings suggest that it was once a city of some consequence, is now a burg well past its prime. But up in the hills on the outskirts of town sits Oglebay Park, a quiet family-friendly resort that we obviously thought enough of to return to after staging the Bertram C. and Christine H. Willis family reunion there two years ago. Think of it as The Greenbrier for ordinary people. Now numbering 22 (including Aunt Coco) our group has grown too large for most of the resort's cottages. And so we got two of them right next to each other. It worked out fine. We did a lot of the same stuff we did there two years ago: pony rides, the crummy local zoo, swimming, tennis, golf, pitch 'n' putt golf, miniature golf, and other things I'm forgetting. It was fun. Most of the stuff was pretty downscale, but great fun for the kids, and a pretty good way for the rest of us to get together. The kids must have played the dumpy little miniature golf course 75 times and still couldn't get enough of it. It really is our kind of place but it remains to be seen if we'll return there.

Of course, some may question why we need to bother scheduling regular family reunions. With Andrew and Jessica's move to the Washington area, the seven "founding members" of the Bert & Chris Willis clan are now concentrated within 150 miles of one another in two small Mid-Atlantic states (Maryland and New Jersey) that practically share a border (unless

you count that little 11-mile stretch of Delaware in the middle, which no one really does. That must be why they charge you two bucks to drive through it—just so you'll remember them. It's been 10 years since my father-in-law drove that stretch of road and he's still bitter about it.) You don't have to contrast my family's proximity with that of Crystal's family, whose seven founding members live in seven different states from Virginia to Alaska, to realize how good we have it. We certainly didn't plan it this way. I wonder how long it'll last.



Tearing up Oglebay's Miniature Golf Course for the 52nd time.
(That's a golf ball under Lucy's chin.)

least we're all sleeping in our new bedrooms and can use the toilets upstairs, even if have to go downstairs to wash our hands (or shower). Hopefully that all gets rectified this week. Hopefully you're well.

School starts tomorrow. Seminary starts Tuesday. I get tired just thinking about it.

The house still has a way to go. But at

Love,
T, C, H, L & S

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