

Dear Family:

I should begin with the most significant news that I've forgotten to mention in each of the last two letters—probably because it only indirectly involves me—that Crystal is expecting our fourth child sometime around the Ides of March. For a number of reasons (none of them valid) Crystal's quack-obstetrician referred her to a perinatologist, who performed an ultrasound on one of those cool GE high-resolution machines capable of producing images that actually resemble something. So when the doctor pointed out all the various body parts I could actually make out what she was talking about, instead of just nodding "uh-huh, yeah" like I did at ultrasounds during Crystal's three previous pregnancies. The imaging was good enough that even I could tell that we're looking at another girl, to Hannah's disappointment. (Nobody believes this. But I wasn't really hoping for a boy—not since Andrew and Jess stole my name, anyway.) Everything appeared normal to the doctor, and Crystal is still feeling well enough to swim and lift weights three days a week. So it's all looking good for now. It's a shame I didn't stay at Fannie Mae long enough to take advantage of the four weeks of paid paternity leave I could have taken. Still, with all they're going through right now, I'm probably better off...probably...I hope...

It's difficult to describe the palpable sense of gloominess and disgust that pervades our otherwise friendly little blue state in the wake of the events of November 2. At times Crystal feels like the only woman in the YMCA locker room not participating in impromptu grieving sessions, commiserating over what a horrible man the president is, and "I don't know if I can go on..." and I don't know what else. While I'm obviously happy with the way the election turned out, and part of me just wants to tell these people where to go, I think I'm enough of a grown-up now to understand that reasonable people can disagree (though the hate-monger Michael Moore/Al Franken/George Soros wing of the Democratic party has long ceased meeting any rational definition of "reasonable") and it's hard to gloat about being on the 51-percent side of the teeter-totter (even though the last Democratic candidate to win a larger share of the popular vote was Lyndon Johnson....Oh, wait, was that gloating? Sorry.) I'm really trying not to be a jackass about it. We frequently need to shush Hannah whenever we walk by a house and she bursts into laughter because "Look! Those guys still have a Kerry/Edwards sign in their yard." I don't think she learned that from us. (At least I hope she didn't.) I don't really know what I'm trying to say here, except that I wish I'd bought stock in whoever makes Xanax. I have to think they're moving a lot of that these days here in blue America.

A week and a half after the election, we got together with Grant and Jen to take in *Miss Saigon* at the Warner Theater. We met up first at the Old Ebbitt Grill to dine and to discuss (in hushed tones) our satisfaction with the election results and other things (but not to gloat, of course). I had the lamb stew, which was okay. (Actually, it must have been better than okay, since I still remember it two weeks later.) The show, which I'd not seen

before, was basically a rip-off of *Madama Butterfly*. (I don't understand what people are trying to accomplish when they re-make Puccini operas. The stories are almost always depressing, and the music absolutely cannot be improved upon. So what are they trying to do? At least when they ripped off *La Bohème* to make *Ren!* they changed it to a happy ending.) But anyway, *Miss Saigon*, despite its abundant cursing and other, um, "adult" content, was actually highly entertaining. "The engineer" dude was fabulous, and I'd recommend it to anyone I don't go to church with.

Thanksgiving was at our house this year and was attended by all the usual suspects (all the Maryland and New Jersey Willises) except Matt's family. Coco was also absent (opting to spend her Thanksgiving in Costa Rica, can you imagine?) so we plugged her spot at the table with my cousin Jacob Corry, his wife Melissa and son Spencer (who didn't really take up a spot). The Corrys won the award for traveling the longest distance, making the journey all the way from Pikeville, Kentucky (an actual place) where he is nearly one-eighth of the way toward becoming a doctor. (The award is a multiple-sentence mention in

the Famlet.) Melissa enjoyed the day-after-Thanksgiving trip into the District more than Jacob did, but he was a better sport about it than I would've been. We very much enjoyed having them with us for three nights and hope to be able to persuade them to come back. (We Willises often talk about how much we like all those Corrys.) Dinner featured our family's first conventionally prepared (i.e., non-deep-fried) Thanksgiving turkey in a number of years, but it still turned out great.

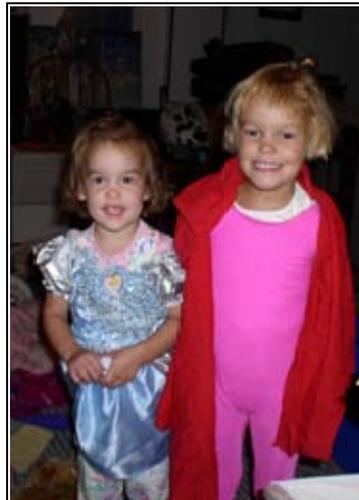
The children are going through a variety of fun phases these days. Sophie's into hieroglyphics and is extraordinarily adept at finding stray pens and using them to scribble on any available wall. She loves to play dress-ups with Lucy (who conveniently loves to play dress-ups with Sophie.)

Lucy is also very much into making sure people get what's coming to them. Rather than hitting back when wronged (Hannah's preferred means of retribution), Lucy's M.O. is to seek out some authority figure, explain her plight, and demand (loudly and at considerable length) the most

draconian possible punishment for her tormenter. Hannah has figured out this tactic and now, whenever she slugs Lucy, immediately sprints in to one of us ahead of her to plead her case and explain as fast as she can how, under some extraordinary set of circumstances (which somehow recur several times daily), she really had no choice but to hit (or bite, or shove, or name-call) her sister. Whenever this happens you can count on Lucy running into the room seconds later screaming, "PUNISH HER! PUNISH HER! PUNISH HER!" Yeah, I can't wait for another girl.

Finally, it probably bears mentioning that Hannah's baptism is scheduled for two weeks from yesterday. She is very excited about it, which makes us very happy. I believe everybody we might reasonably expect to want to come has known of this for some time. But if we've somehow neglected you and you'd really like to come, please feel free. Unfortunately, however, all the free lodging is pretty much spoken for.

Hope all is well with you.



Sophie and Lucy playing dress-ups and reacting to the prospect of a second Bush term

Love,
T, C, H, L & S

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