

## Dear Family:

I have shaken Marion Barry's hand.

It was in the spring of 1998. And the rest of the story is long and uninteresting, so I won't tell it. But it dovetails nicely into an experience I had two Sundays ago during which, for a fleeting moment, I felt I had a kindred spirit in the crack-smoking, tax-evading, prostitute-patronizing (but otherwise very personable) former mayor of the District of Columbia. That moment occurred when I looked out my bedroom window to find that more than a foot of snow had fallen overnight.

Barry might be best known outside Washington for his riotous lifestyle. Within Washington, however, he probably gained at least as much notoriety for his snow-removal policy, which was basically: "It'll melt."

Although I was sure that the snow would result in the cancellation of all church-related activities, thus freeing up the entire day, the prospect of clearing my driveway and walks after a brutally long workweek—one that, once again, included spending at least part of Saturday in the office—got me to thinking that Hizzonor might have really been on to something. So, instead of going outside to shovel I retreated to my office to start writing my seminary lessons for the week. As I wrote, however, I was distracted by what was transpiring out the window. One by one, the neighbors—including the elderly couple two doors down—were emerging from their houses, clearing not only their walks and driveways, but the small cul-de-sac we all share. (Yes, people were actually shoveling the *street!*) Obviously, the rest of the neighborhood had not experienced the same Marion Barry epiphany that I had. And by noon every walk in sight had been shoveled...except mine. My next thought was to try and hire the kid next door. But before I could act on that thought, my mind turned to my aged parents, who despite having more money, more snow, and a much longer driveway than me, were doubtless out shoveling it themselves. (I later learned that they had also cleared the walks of *their* elderly next-door neighbor.) And that's when it finally occurred to me that it won't be until after my parents have gone the way of all the earth that I'll be able in good conscience to hire anyone to shovel my walks for me. So I did it myself. And I felt much better afterward.

Incidentally, Barry's enduring prophecy was fulfilled. The next several days brought temperatures in the 60s and by the following weekend there was no evidence of it ever having snowed. So, three cheers for the cokehead!

We spent that following weekend (including Presidents' Day) in Moorestown, New Jersey at the house with the aforementioned long driveway. More accurately, we used the Moorestown homestead as a base of operations for two trips into Philadelphia. Saturday centered around a visit to the Franklin Institute science museum. Then, on Monday, we traded Grandma and Grandpa and the three youngest girls for Charlotte Corry and returned to the city to experience the National Constitution Center for the first time. It's a pretty cool place.

You should go. The plan was to do the Constitution Center, eat lunch at a little pizza-and-cheesesteak dive and go home. But Hannah noticed during lunch that her menu featured a small drawing of the Liberty Bell and was quite taken with it. It so happened that we were eating just five blocks away from the *real* Liberty Bell. And so we went. (We were unprepared for all the post-9/11 security enhancements that have made visiting the Liberty Bell and Independence Hall just slightly less annoying than hopping a flight out of Raleigh/Durham. I'm not sure which one is the better terrorist deterrent: the security screening or the Disney-like lines it engenders. *Golly, Mahfouz, I'd really like to get in and blow this place up, but would you look at that line!* Dad never could have made it as a terrorist.) But having Charlotte with us actually made waiting fun. We felt fortunate that our trip coincided with the tail end of one of her bi-monthly trips to someplace cool. (The cool place for this trip was actually New York City, but she was kind enough to back that trip up with a couple of days in Moorestown.) Since this is apparently the letter for dropping famous M.B. names, I'll insert here that Charlotte is the controller (or, if you're feeling pretentious, the *comptroller*) of the Utah Festival Opera Company, whose founder and general director is one Michael Ballam. So she's presumably shaken his hand on at least one occasion. I'm assuming he's *not* a crack addict.

Naturally, I'd prefer to fill this space with more detail about the lives of my children. I could write, for example, that Lucy, as I type this, is shouting, "I can't breathe!" louder than I would have thought anybody could. She's also cycling through, "Help is a word!" and "I'm dying!" followed, finally, by near silence. But, the sad fact is, aside from last weekend's excursion, I seldom see them when they're awake. I'm still basically living at Fannie Mae's Bethesda office where I still gaze out the window at the temple whenever I get a spare moment. Every new guy from out of town has the same question: "What *is* that thing?"



Princess Grace  
(Her only mention in this letter)

It probably comes across as smug, but my standard response is simple: "That's where I got married." (Which is usually good for at least one follow-up question. Maybe I should start brining pass-along cards.) The spires are scheduled to be re-gilded soon. That might be fun to watch.

I'd like to thank everybody who rushed to my defense in the matter of last month's traffic citation. To you who didn't see it exactly my way, may I submit that sometimes, in order to see, you first have to *want* to believe (see Alma 32:27).

I paid the fine. Have a nice month.

Love,  
T, C, H, L, S & G

100 HANNES STREET  
SILVER SPRING, MARYLAND 20901