

## Dear Family:

A new era has begun in our family. It is the era in which nothing on the kitchen counter is safe. Grace has gotten so that she can reach most objects that are near the edge of the counter. I realized this when I found a kitchen knife in my upstairs hallway. It's bad enough that she can reach the edge of the counter, but she's also figured out that she can push a step stool across the kitchen and get almost anything that's up there. Lock up your knives and, perhaps just as importantly, anything to which a 21-month-old might apply the word "cookie". Her sisters taught her to say "cookie" one night while she was sitting nicely in her high chair waiting for family home evening treat. They actually taught her to chant, "I like cookie" over and over. To the uninitiated it may sound like "I ite tootie", but to those of us who are terrorized by this chant its meaning is all too clear. If you're taking a hot apple crisp out of the oven, the chant means you'd better find a place far back from the edge of the kitchen counter to place that hot dish while you madly confiscate and fold up the kitchen step stool, placing it out of reach to the accompaniment of disappointed howls. If you're trying to feed Grace some healthy, non-sweet food, the chant means you've got a fight on your hands.

I had to take a break after that paragraph because I was interrupted by, you guessed it, the sound of Grace crying in the kitchen. Don't worry, she's not hurt. I'm not sure what she was trying to do, but whatever it was, she couldn't quite manage it. Fortunately there are some things she still can't accomplish, even by setting her mind to them. Frustration with the physical world will make a toddler cry every time. Sometimes it will even get to a 34-year-old male homeowner who doesn't consider himself handy. (*Editor: Uh...yeah, okay.*)

Sophie continues to enjoy preschool and is experimenting with letters more and more. I have occasionally seen her rebuff the overtures to friendship from one particular little blue-eyed blonde in her class that I can see nothing wrong with. Her teachers say she's not generally a mean girl, so that's a relief, but apparently some of the social kinks are still being worked out.

Lucy gave a talk on Job in primary last Sunday. When we got the call mid-week asking her to speak I accepted on her behalf, thinking that during the long holiday weekend we should have no problem helping her to put a talk together. When I mentioned the subject to her, however, she went ballistic—screaming that she'd never given a talk and couldn't possibly do it. (This assertion turns out to have been false on both counts.) Now I see that Lucy has developed a bargaining strategy that involves taking an extreme position early and loudly. After the screaming, I was relieved a few days later when she agreed that if I wrote the talk, she would be willing to read it. Thus was born perhaps the darkest primary talk on thankfulness ever written. Why the story of Job? Somehow it seemed appropriate.

An update on Lucy's *I Love Lucys*: the girls love them. Every night before bed they want to watch an episode or two. Often, Hannah can hardly contain herself; she's so disturbed about the level to which Lucy Ricardo is in the process of embarrassing herself. Sophie always wants to watch an episode with Little Ricky, which can be tough because he gets talked about a lot more often than he's actually seen. The girls have actually started rehearsing scenes from some of their favorite episodes. The

favorite scene to run through is one in which Lucy is confronted by the conductor of a train she's just stopped by pulling the emergency handle. There's something very funny about hearing Sophie ask, as authoritatively as possible, "Madam, did you stop this train by pulling that handle?" Everyone takes turns being Lucy (who responds, "Well, I didn't stop it by dragging my foot."). It's a big hit and I think their comedic timing is improving. We're running a regular little comedy academy.

Hannah keeps getting taller and more lady-like. She is taking more responsibility around the house and getting really skilled at dealing with the fits and piques of her younger sisters. She still sometimes partakes in their pettiness, but is learning to see that doing so doesn't really get her anywhere. We work together on developing strategies to help things run more smoothly. At school, she is involved in "radio show" which basically means that she and the other radio show kids are responsible for reading the announcements every morning. She does this two mornings a week and seems to enjoy it. The one thing causing a little stress right now is the process of filling out applications for the two middle school magnet programs that she's eligible for next year. One is a communication arts magnet program and the other is science and math. We're trying not to place too much emphasis on the importance of getting in, but finding time to work on the essays that the application requires is a bit of a pain.

We thoroughly enjoyed Thanksgiving this year at Grandma Chris and Grandpa Bert's new house. Since they moved here in October, the family has a new center and it's local! The house is gorgeous and seems perfectly decorated already. I'm sure Chris would offer some modest disavowal of this statement, but for me right now, high class means that there are hardly any fingerprints on the wall and no holes in the upholstery. By this standard, their place is a palace. Dinner was delicious and there were over 30 people there. They included Tim's Aunt Coco, brothers Grant (with wife Jen + 4) and Andrew (with wife Jessica + 2), cousin Richard (with wife Joann + 4), Joann's visiting sister Janet, cousin Reed, and a member of our ward who didn't have other plans and was really fun to get to know a little better. We missed the rest of you and look forward to someday celebrating holidays together.

Finally, some mommy news! After a recent Famlet mention that I'd taken up jogging, my sister-in-law Jen suggested that we choose a race to train for together. (By "together" I mean more or less simultaneously, but in different locations. We never actually ran together until the race, but it was great having someone with whom to share training strategies and stories.) We ran a five mile race last Saturday. The weather was great, the park was beautiful, Jen left me in the dust and I was happy to finish in 56 minutes and I'm not sure how many seconds. I'm not fast, but enjoyed the whole thing and we're looking for a 10K this spring. It's very exciting for me to be running further than I ever have before.

*The Editor is up to his neck in tithing settlement and has nothing to add. He is informed that his alma mater was trailing Utah with like three seconds left or something, but didn't see the end. How'd that turn out, anyway? Somehow it didn't get brought up in ward council the next morning, even though the council includes 7 BYU grads (versus 2 Utah alums).*

*In case we don't get a card out – Merry Christmas!*

*And since we crammed Page One full of text, how about some pictures for Page Deux?*

*Here we have the girls approaching the finish line (and the Democrats' new seat of power) at the annual Saturday-before-Thanksgiving Help the Homeless Walkathon*



*...And all gussied up for Sunday*

