

Do you know how many gallons of red maple sap it takes to make one gallon of red maple syrup?

Lucy does.

"Sixty to eighty gallons," she reports, lying here next to me on my bed. "But it only takes 40 gallons of sugar maple sap to make a gallon of sugar maple syrup." She learned these amazing, useful facts yesterday at the Maple Sugar Festival at the Brookside Gardens Nature Center on her "date" with her mother.

About a year ago Crystal and I began a monthly date rotation with the girls. This month was Lucy's turn with Mommy and Sophie's turn with me. The trip to the Maple Sugar Festival is representative of the kinds of interesting dates Crystal takes the girls on. I, on the other hand, am more likely to take them on an exciting trip to the driving range where they can hit golf balls with me. Hannah, who has her own little set of junior golf clubs, likes that just fine. But it's a tougher sell for Sophie. So this month we went to dinner and movie. The movie was *Night at the Museum*, which was cute enough, but it hardly matters. As long as Sophie gets her popcorn and Skittles, she'd be content to watch a Holocaust documentary. Conversely, if she *doesn't* get her popcorn and Skittles, you're in for two hours of @\$#!% no matter what the film is. (Just a word to the wise if you're ever inclined to take Sophie to a movie.)

Since Lucy's here next to me, here are the remaining highlights from her month (in her words):

- "I had a sleep-over with Hanna Moore"
- "I made a snowman and am working on a snow fort."
- "I tortured Hannah [Willis] by kissing her."

Lucy omitted from her highlights the grand time she, Hannah, and Sophie had sleeping over at Grandma's/pa's house on President's Day Eve. I sense a tradition brewing on three-day weekends where Grandma and Grandpa have all the "big" grandkids spend Sunday night at their place and then go out to breakfast Monday morning. We'd like it better if they took Grace, too. But we take what we can get.

And now for my annual commentary on the weather: After an unseasonably warm January (including one Saturday in the 70s on which I was able to squeeze in 18 holes with Reed Farnsworth), our area has just completed its coldest 30-day span in 13 years. Interestingly, a lot of the same people who were

crediting Global Warming for our golfable January are now blaming our miserably cold February on—you guessed it!—Global Warming! Personally, I'm a committed agnostic on the subject, but I know political hay when I see it.

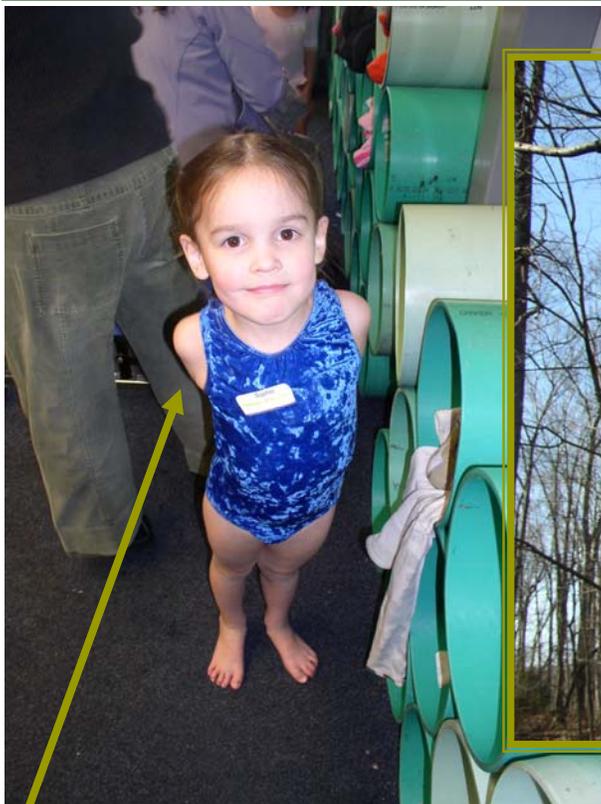
Most of the recent weather news has focused on areas north of us that have been blanketed with snow accumulation measured in yardsticks. But do you know what's worse than three feet of snow? We do: Three inches of snow frozen solid with a half-inch of solid ice on top of it. Virtually unshovelable and with temperatures never cracking freezing for a week straight, it was almost enough to make us pick up and move to California. (More on that in a minute.)

I was, in fact, in California during the great Valentine's Day ice storm that shuttered our schools for three days and sullied my favorite airline's reputation. For what it's worth, I remain a loyal Jet Blue fan even though their delays robbed me of several hours of my life last week. In one of life's great reality checks, I spent Thursday evening in sunny and warm Venice Beach (where I had dinner with Crystal's sister-in-law, Mimi and my nephew, Sid), flew home (eventually) that night on the red-eye, and eight hours later was one of a group of guys chipping through the three-inch glacier surrounding our chapel with pick-axes, garden shovels, edging tools (everything except snow shovels, which were completely useless) in an effort to get the walks passable in time for Sunday services. I guess life has a way of evening itself out.

I was in Southern California because I've technically been working there since November. My employer is a large company called [First American](#), headquartered in Orange County. My role is still sort of evolving. But right now it consists mainly of writing industry white papers. (If you don't know what a white paper is, well, I don't feel like explaining it right now. There's probably an entry on [Wikipedia](#), but I'm too lazy to look it up.) The decision to change jobs was essentially the most tortured of my career. But it basically boiled down to money and a company that I am almost certain will still be around in five years. (Though I've never stayed at a firm for more than three years, so why that should matter to me is a bit of a mystery.) We have no plans to move west. I'm enjoying working from home and don't mind the occasional cross-country jaunts. The company is reportedly close to obtaining some DC-area office space to accommodate me and the half-dozen or so other ex-Fannie Mae people they've recently acquired. We'll see.

We hope this finds you well.





Lucy tapping sap at the Maple Sugar Festival

This is Sophie. She began gymnastics lessons this month.

*I don't know the age at which a child is supposed to be able to pronounce consonants from the back of her mouth. Maybe it's the same age as when she's able to distinguish POTUS from the President of the Church. Sophie obviously isn't there yet. (But we still love her.)*



Our president has a wife and two daughters.

President Bush, First Lady Laura Bush, 3



Hannah sends her love.

This is an excerpt from Sophie's Weekly Reader from preschool. According to Sophie, "This is Dordon B. Heentley's wife. And these are Dordon B. Heentley's daughters."