

**"Spelling bees are serious sh\*\*."**

--Javier (I think it was Javier) in "Akeelah and the Bee"

The obscenity notwithstanding, it's a pretty funny line in its own context. But I don't know if I would have found it quite as amusing if I hadn't been sitting in a movie theater full of sixth graders.

Hannah's favorite class at the moment is "Lights, Camera, Literacy!" which, according to the school district, "connects filmmaking and text by helping students learn how to read visual text and create effective visual communications." I have no idea what that means, but Hannah really likes it.

And who wouldn't? Their very first activity involved skipping morning classes to walk from school to the [AFI Silver Theater and Cultural Center](#) in downtown Silver Spring for a free private screening of "Akeelah and the Bee".

I was unemployed at the time, so I volunteered to chaperone. The teacher, Mr. Jackson, seemed genuinely appreciative, but I really just wanted to see the movie, which I'd heard was good, but had never gotten around to seeing. (The film was good—not terribly plausible and fairly formulaic, but good.) And the unbridled reactions of audience members to the occasional curse word and certain culturally awkward moments (loudly booing, for example, when the stereotypically overachieving Asian kid is warned by his stereotypically overbearing Asian father that he'll never get anywhere if he can't even beat a little black girl) made the experience even more enjoyable.

Hannah appears to have overcome her initial apprehensions about being able to find her way from her third-floor locker to classrooms scattered around the sprawling building on time, and now seems to enjoy her days at Silver Spring International Middle School. Although the school's uppity-sounding name may evoke images of boys in crested blue blazers and girls in matching plaid jumpers, it is in reality just an average public middle school working through its own set of No Child Left Behind issues. The school's name derives from its affiliation with the [International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme](#), which I don't know a lot about, but sounds like a good thing.

Lucy and Sophie are enjoying third grade and kindergarten, and, if I ever get around to chaperoning one of their class activities, maybe I'll have more to say about them in a future letter.

I should probably elaborate a little on my passing reference to unemployment. I signed off last month's letter bemoaning the state of the industry in which I

work and wondering how much longer I'd have a job. In reality, while it's true that layoffs continue to abound in the mortgage biz, I felt a certain amount of security in my particular situation and in what I thought was my former employer's commitment to a new line of business, which should have been immune from all the subprime and Alt-A fallout.

I was wrong. Under the terms of my severance agreement, I am forbidden from making disparaging remarks about my former employer. As a result, I don't have a whole lot to say, except that within 24 hours of sending last month's letter I received word that my entire department was being eliminated. (And me with it.)

My first call was to the bosses I'd abandoned 11 months earlier (ironically, to go to a place I thought could offer better job security). Inexplicably, they actually expressed an interest in taking me back, so Reed Farnsworth and I now both work for [The Hollister Group](#), a financial modeling and risk management consulting firm. My first objective is to get my name and bio back on the Web site—which will require some sucking up.

After it became clear that I was going to be able to get back on at Hollister, I spent my three weeks between jobs mostly goofing off. Amazingly, even with all the extra time to practice, I'm still an awful golfer. It also gave me time to reflect on the fact that the only guys with real job security are undertakers and tax collectors. And since neither of those jobs really appeals to me (except maybe tax collector), and I lack the smarts and entrepreneurial spirit to go into business for myself, I guess I'm consigned to a permanent state of always wondering if I'm about to get canned. It's kind of an uncomfortable feeling, but if it's the worst thing that ever happens to me, I can live with that.

As of this writing, it isn't clear whether the Phillies will make the post-season, but we did our part to cheer them toward the pennant last weekend by attending "Mormon Night at the Washington Nationals" sponsored by the Washington, DC chapter of the BYU Alumni Association. We had a good time, and because Washington is a civilized city—unlike, say, Philadelphia or Baltimore—we could openly cheer for the visiting Phillies without any fear of brutalization in the men's room. Sophie spent most of the game explaining to me all the various ways she could die if she didn't get some cotton candy, and Grace kept trying to sneak away to find better seats, but overall the girls had such a good time that we almost made it into the sixth inning.



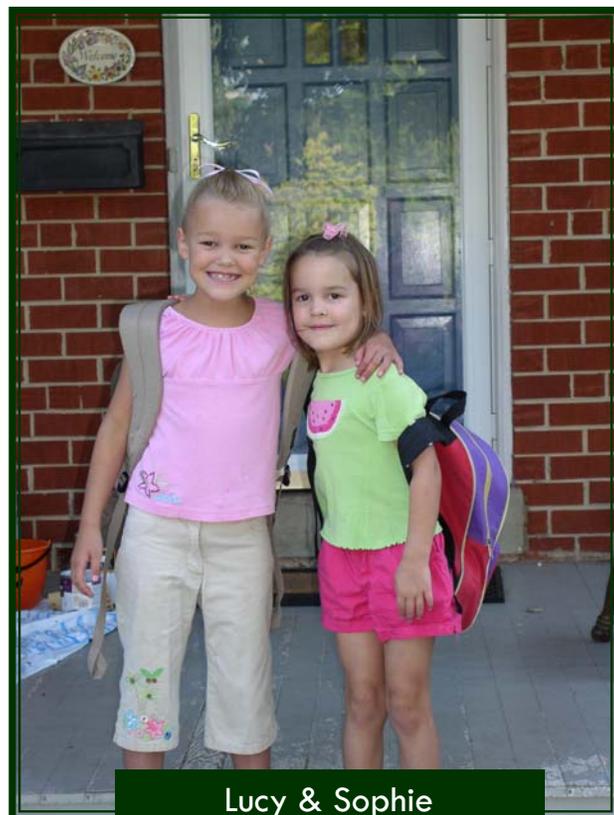
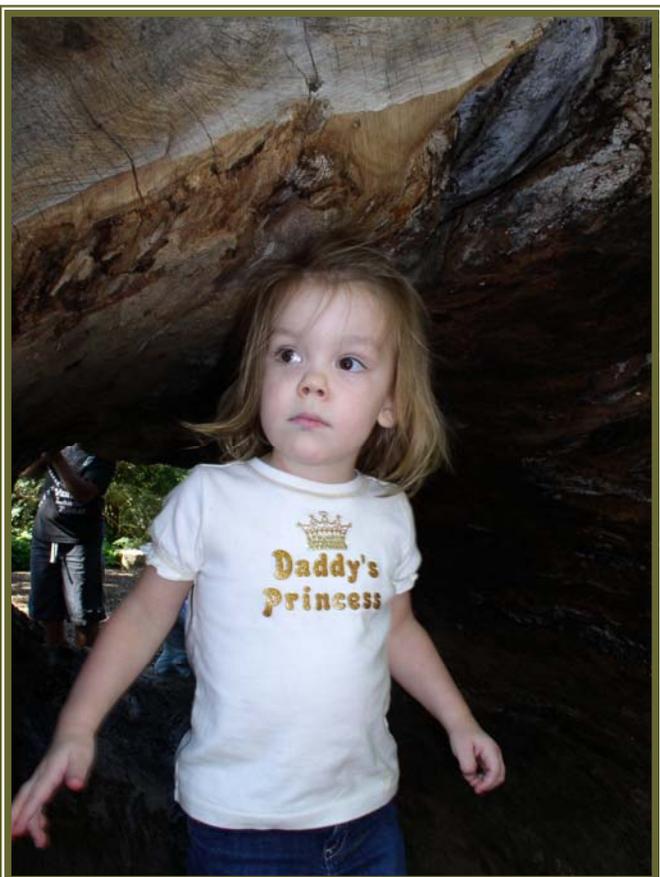
Finally, Lucy turns 8 on Friday, and yesterday was her birthday party at the YMCA swimming pool. No one drowned. We're hoping our luck holds up at her baptism at 6 P.M. on October 13th. See you there.



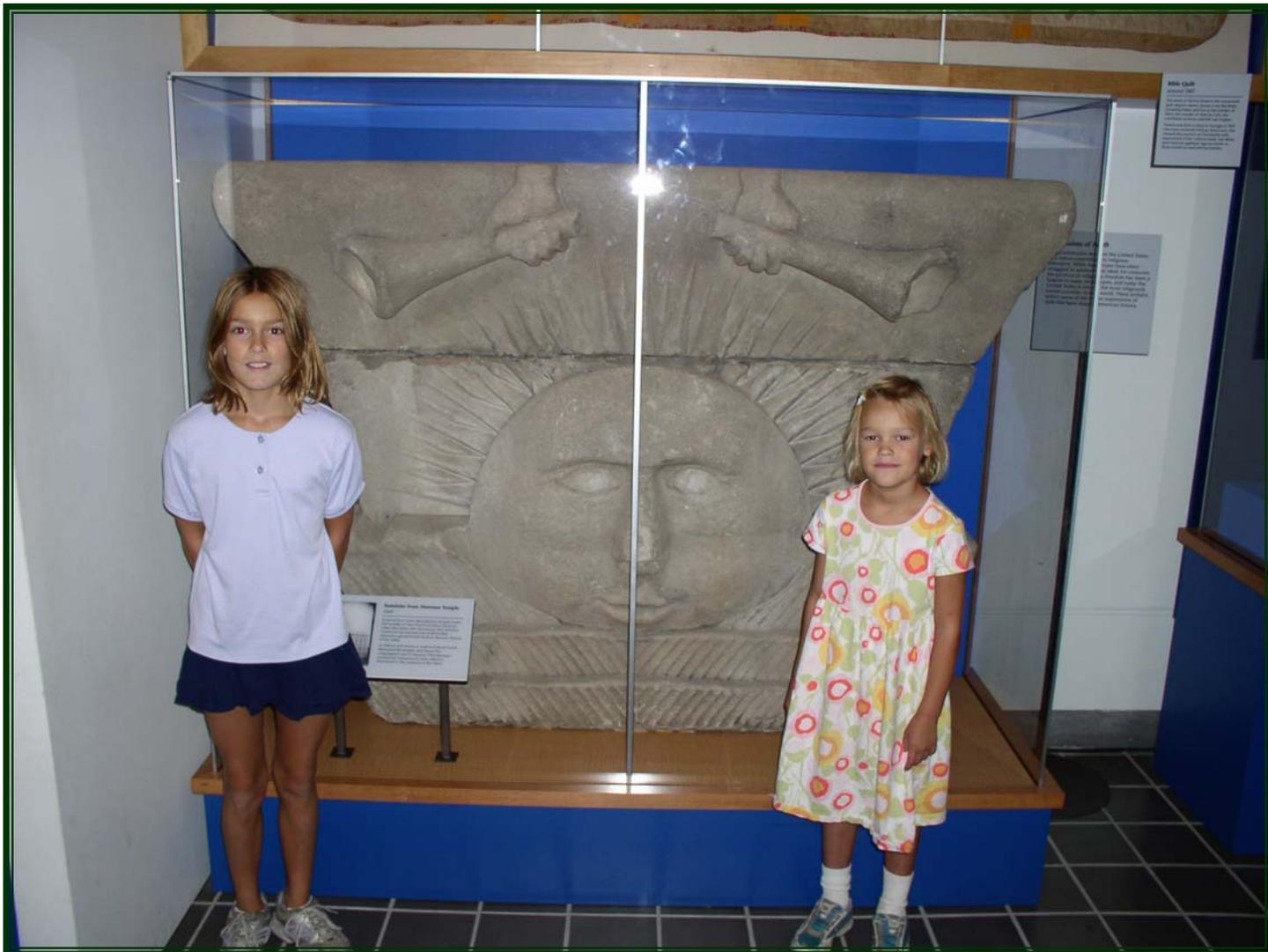
Sophie makes paper on Children's "Tree-rific" Day at Brookside Gardens



(Below)  
Grace explores a hollowed-out tree on Children's "Tree-rific" Day.



Lucy & Sophie  
First Day of School



I had no idea that a Nauvoo Temple Sunstone was in the Smithsonian. But there it is, between Hannah and Lucy; right around the corner from Abe Lincoln's hat, Susan B. Anthony's gavel, and Archie Bunker's chair; and across the gallery from Dorothy's ruby slippers, R2-D2, and C-3PO.

The National Museum of American History, where these items are ordinarily housed, is closed for renovation until next summer. But they've crammed a temporary exhibit of these and other American History favorites into a corner of the Air & Space Museum during the closure.

This picture was taken on Thursday, September 13, which the girls had off for Rosh Hashanah, and their father had off because he didn't have a job. Come to Lucy's baptism on October 13, and you can go see it for yourself!