

So Sophie wants to take up the violin. She can't always remember the word "violin," but whenever she returns home from a play-date with her budding violinist friends, Madelyn and Joshua, she expresses her desire to begin studying the instrument by rubbing one of her forefingers perpendicularly across the other and saying, "I want one of *these*."

It's enough to make your heart melt. Wait. Let me put that another way: It's enough to make your heart melt. But not this grouch's. It's going to take a lot more than big, longing puppy-dog eyes and cute hand gestures for me to subject myself to the incessant fingernails-on-blackboard screeching I associate with novice violin playing. Notwithstanding the premise of a [famous 1979 southern rock ballad](#) that the devil is an above-average fiddler, my personal view is that he's probably a lousy violinist and does nothing but play it all day long. That sounds like hell to me.

My preference is to be a leech on society by allowing other parents to suffer through the violin developmental years so I can enjoy the finished product. Crystal, Hannah and I joined all seven of our adult Montgomery County relatives in doing this last Friday night. The ten of us returned to [Strathmore](#) (where we've now been three times in the past six months thanks to Mom & Dad's generous offer to pay for half the cost of admission whenever we go with them) to take in "Highland, Heath and Holler: Celtic Music's Voyage to Appalachia." The 3,075-sq.-foot Marriott Concert Stage was occupied by just five musicians, including fiddlers [Alasdair Fraser](#) (from the Highland), [Martin Hayes](#) (from the Heath), and [Bruce Molsky](#) (from the Holler). They were accompanied by some guitarist (who was good, but let's face it, real musicians don't play fretted instruments) and a [young cellist](#) who demonstrated, among other things, how the cello can be a percussion folk instrument. (She also unwittingly demonstrated why all cellists who face the audience head-on, regardless of gender, probably should opt for pants over dresses—or at least pants *under* dresses.)

I think I'd make a lousy music critic for the same reason Homer Simpson proved to be a lousy restaurant critic (i.e., he loved everything). But I'll try anyway: These guys were mesmerizing. The 2 1/2 hours went by in a flash and left us wanting more (even though we sprinted out of the hall with the last note of the encore still hanging in the air because I wanted to beat the traffic out of the garage—it's my nature; I can't help it).

As for my girls, I'll be satisfied if they became proficient enough piano players to contribute to their wards when they grow up. At the moment, our ward's most competent keyboardists are tied up in the bishopric, relief society presidency, elders quorum presidency and high council. This has compelled the bishopric to ask the ward music chair (currently one Crystal Willis) to establish a make-shift organist rotation, which I'm sure is a pain in her

neck to manage, but is better than not having *any* organists, which seems to be the direction in which an increasing number of units are headed.

The girls' piano training took a bit of a detour several months ago when they started taking lessons from their father. I had just been laid off and we were looking for places to cut costs. I wasn't overly impressed by the progress they were making with their old teacher anyway, so I decided to take over. As a piano teacher I'm a tyrant, and most weeks end with at least one of the girls having cried during her lesson (anyone else want to hire me?). But they're moving forward (except when their mother doesn't make them practice), so I continue to teach them, even though I said I'd never teach my own kids, and even though I'm gainfully employed again.

Of course, given Lucy's practice regimen, it probably doesn't much matter who her teacher is. Her practice sessions typically consist of: 1) setting the kitchen timer for the requisite number of minutes, 2) playing one piece, 3) getting up and walking into the kitchen to check the timer, 4) returning to the piano and twiddling her thumbs for two minutes, 5) checking the timer, 6) playing a scale, 7) checking the timer, 8) searching (unsuccessfully) for missing piano books, 9) checking the timer.... We could probably improve her efficiency by moving the timer into the living room, but that's a lot of work...

Grace hasn't started piano lessons yet, but she likes to sing along with her (or maybe it's her sister's) sing-along Barbie doll. Grace mimics the doll in every possible way, right down to the fake vibrato. It's cute (for a little while) but awfully repetitive.

I don't think missionaries are allowed to surf the Web (not even to a page as innocuous as this), so somebody ought to tell Sora Bingham that I used one of her letters (dated Jan. 7) in my ward welfare committee training a couple of weeks ago. The letter referenced Elder Erich W. Kopsichke (of the Europe Central Area Presidency—in the grand tradition of missionary-letter-writing, she spells his name in a variety of ways, but I assume this is who she's referring to) who taught that faithful tithe-paying was the surest solution to Romania's economic challenges. Noting the number of members our ward has been supporting financially who don't have strong tithing histories, I suggested that the principle wasn't unique to Romania.

Church basketball is underway. Now that I'm an old graying bishop (I turn 36 this week), I finally have an excuse for stinking up the court. I'm trying to keep a lid on the dirty little secret that I'm really no worse a player now than I was 15 years ago. Still, I feel badly that the good players feel some obligation to put me in the game once in a while. Maybe I should quit.

All in all, everything's okay with us. Now if we could just get Grace to stop shoving beads up her nose. (She calls them "blueberries.") Have a nice month.





Sophie, Lucy & Hannah — Honing their [Webkinz](#) skills in Hannah's room



Grace—monopolizing my bed (shortly after her trip to the ENT doc to remove a bead lodged in her nose)



Lucy — doing her best “Charades” giraffe at neighbor Arshya’s birthday party.