

Dear Family,

The standard 8-mile route home from Grandma's house takes us south on New Hampshire Avenue, past a firehouse with a readerboard that displays safety tips. ("Fireworks are illegal in Montgomery County," "Space heaters need space," "Don't barbecue indoors," "Try *not* to set your house on fire," and other common-sense suggestions.) A few weeks ago I noticed that the board had been changed and was now reminding passing motorists to change their smoke alarm batteries

It took every ounce of restraint I could muster not to pull over and start throwing things at it.

By American standards our 2,350-sq.-foot (excluding the basement) house is average in size. But when we had it remodeled (and expanded to its present size) four years ago, the electrician, in order to comply with local code, needed to install no fewer than *ten* new hard-wired smoke detectors. I don't know anything. But that seems like a lot.

Naturally, because we're all belt-and-suspenders people when it comes to fire safety, all these smoke alarms require batteries even though they're wired into the electrical system. And every six months or so (usually after midnight) two or three of them start chirping a reminder that their batteries need replacing.

What usually happens next is I stumble out of bed, spend the next 45 minutes figuring out which alarms are making noise (it's hard to tell because several of them are very close together), spend another 30 minutes looking for 9-volt batteries, spend another 20 minutes trying to figure out how to detach the alarms from their power sources without electrocuting myself, change the @#\$\$% batteries, and then spend the rest of the night unable to get back to sleep because I'm so infuriated with our nanny-state government that makes me do all this.

That's the *successful* scenario. Unfortunately, it doesn't always work so well. The bare wires dangling from the ceiling in the downstairs hallway, where I unceremoniously ripped a particularly uncooperative smoke alarm from its mooring a few weeks ago, are evidence of the *unsuccessful* scenario.

I'm a very impatient man. But what can I say, I'm Lucy's dad.

But enough about me. Sophie turned 6 this month—an event we celebrated with a dozen or so of Sophie's closest friends. The party had an Easter theme (at Sophie's request) complete with an Easter-basket-shaped birthday cake and stations where guests could pet a live rabbit, decorate treat bags and cookies, attempt to eat Peeps dangling from strings, and search for Easter eggs. But the most popular attraction was the large birthday-cake-shaped moon bounce in the backyard, courtesy of our next-door neighbors whose business is renting them out, but who refused to let us pay for it (though I suppose I could have been more insistent).

After the party (and between General Conference sessions) we had a visit from my cousin, future Nobel-Prize-winning chemist (and fellow Mormon bishop) Professor

George Huber. He brought his three children, but they quickly disappeared into the moon bounce and I never saw them again. This freed up George to commiserate with me about our common second life. I was comforted to learn that I'm not the only bishop who finds managing welfare needs really hard. But even when we don't have all the answers, there's just something therapeutic about being able to ask "What do you do, when..." questions of someone who's fighting a lot of the same battles.

Excuse me, Narcissus, when are you going to get off yourself and start writing about those cute girls? What about the little one, Grace? Is she still smearing poop all over her bedroom wall?

Not so much anymore. But that's mostly because she's now sleeping on the bottom bunk in Sophie's room. The idea is to let Sophie and Grace sleep in Sophie's bedroom, and move both dressers and all the toys into Grace's room, thus enabling them essentially to share two bedrooms. This was prompted in part by our desire to steer Grace away from her latest naptime ritual of waking up and scattering all the contents of her dresser around the room. The new arrangement has solved some problems, but has also been fraught with unintended consequences. More on those next month. Maybe.

Hannah spent three days and two nights earlier this week at "Outdoor Education" — essentially a three-day two-night excursion during which Montgomery County sixth graders receive instruction that, according to the county, is best appreciated outdoors. I'll let Hannah fill you in on the details. She seems to have had a good time (notwithstanding the ban on "cassette players and phonographs"). She might have some vague notion of what a cassette player is, but wouldn't know what a phonograph was if she looked up the word in a dictionary. It was particularly amusing to find these restrictions listed in the program's *online* guide.

Because of my frustration with smoke detectors (stupid government!) there isn't enough room for Hannah's complete account of Outdoor Ed, so I've had to move it to its own page. If you're too lazy to click over and read the whole thing, here's the Reader's Digest version:

The students rotated through four activities: Stream Study, Orienteering, Predator/Prey, and something called Confidence Course. Hannah claims to have had the most fun in Predator/Prey but to have only really learned anything during Orienteering.

Orienteering? Is there a more useless skill in the world of inexpensive GPS devices? We have three of them (if you include the one on Crystal's watch that she wears jogging). It reminds me of how I felt in high school when we were all forced to memorize that complicated algorithm for computing square roots even though every one of us had a calculator with a square root button on it. (But what would happen if we were stranded in the woods without a calculator—or a laptop, or a cell phone—and were confronted by a life-and-death emergency that required us to calculate a square root? *Then what would we do?*)

I've long since forgotten the algorithm, so I guess I'd be hosed. This hasn't been very helpful. You should just read Hannah's account. Have a nice month.

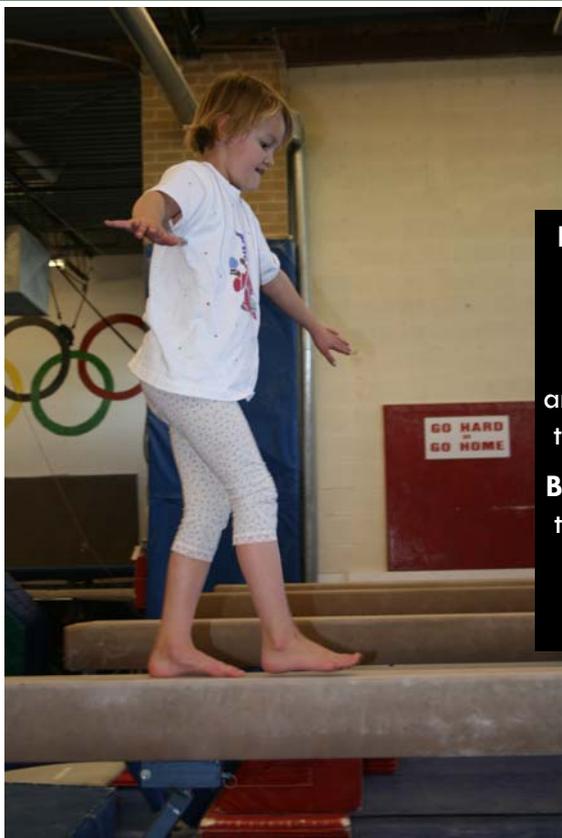




Left: Grace enjoys a trip to the firehouse (not the one with the offensive readerboard).

Below: Sometimes Grace takes all her clothes off before running out to play in the back-yard. I haven't thoroughly researched kiddie porn statutes and hope I don't get arrested for this.





Left: Lucy at some kid's gymnastics birthday party

Right: Sophie (age 6) and rabbit at her Easter-themed birthday party.

Below: Hannah mugs for the camera in the moon bounce at the same party

