

Dear Family,

It's Saturday night, and Crystal is out with a group of girlfriends at what is probably Silver Spring's finest ceviche restaurant. She's explained to her friends that she's going to have to peel off early before the rest of the group moves to the movie theater across the street to watch what has to be the most highly anticipated chick flick in cinematic history: *Sex and the City*. I'm not sure what excuse she's using, but presumably it will be something more diplomatic than "I belong to this church that counsels me to avoid pornography, so I can't go. Would you like to know more?"

In other words, Crystal's company at this moment differs somewhat from the company I was keeping eight days ago at this time.

I'm trying to remember the last time I was on a charter bus full of middle school students. It was probably 22 years ago on my own 8th grade field trip to the United Nations in New York City. I have absolutely no recollection of who the chaperones were that day (I'm assuming we had them), but I now wish I could apologize to them.

About a month ago I learned that Hannah's middle school chorus would be traveling to Hershey, Pa. to participate in an event called Music in the Parks—an allegedly educational pursuit consisting of performing in front of a couple of judges for about 8 minutes, and then going into HersheyPark and riding roller coasters for about 8 hours.

I subsequently learned that the school was reluctant to pay the chorus's usual accompanist for a 15-hour day that would involve 10 minutes of actual piano playing, and that Hannah had suggested to the director that I was a really good piano player who would probably be willing to accompany the chorus for free.

Well, not exactly for free. I think that among the dozen or so chaperones distributed across the four buses carrying Silver Spring International Middle School's chorus, jazz band, concert band, and orchestra to Hershey last Friday, I was the only one who didn't have to pay.

But was a free bus ride to Hershey and admission to Hershey-Park worth it? I think it might have been, but I'm still assessing the damage.

Let's begin with the performance itself. I've now been accompanying choirs off and on for most of my life, and I don't really get nervous about screwing up anymore. But I'm not accustomed to performing in front of judges. It's something Mrs. Pittman (my piano teacher) made me do fairly regularly when I was in high school, but I haven't really done it since.

And I've learned from hard experience that being the accompanist doesn't really provide any cover. I think I'm permanently scarred by a 13-year-old memory of accompanying Roland Kent (Crystal's brother) at a BYU cello master class. I can't remember what we played (it

was something by Rachmaninoff), but at the end Roland's self-absorbed music professor (redundant, I know) spent about 10 seconds telling Roland (the cellist playing in the cello master class) what a good job he'd done and then spent what seemed like 15 minutes berating me for totally misinterpreting the piano accompaniment. I keep thinking I'm over it, but every once in a while, something like this will trigger the memory, and I still, for the life of me, can't get over what a jackass that guy was.

But even with that sordid memory lurking in the back of my mind, I think I played well enough not to distract the judges from the chorus, which placed second in its division.

During the rest of the day I was assigned to account for 12 middle school students. They weren't required to stay with me in the park, but I was responsible for, among other things, seeing that they made it back to the buses by 8 pm for the 2+-hour drive home.

In this I failed miserably (though I wasn't the only one). It wasn't only because of the one girl who, after hearing my instruction to be back at the main gate by 7:45, explained to me that her family is always late for everything, so she probably wouldn't be there on time. (Notwithstanding her apparent genetic predisposition to tardiness, she was one of the few to arrive close to on time, which was good since she didn't have a cell phone.) With those who did have cell phones I had the same conversation so many times, I've got it permanently burned into my memory:

Me: It's 8 o'clock, where are you?

Girl: I think I'm lost.

Me: We need to leave. Follow the signs to the Main Gate.

Girl: What do the signs look like?

Me: They have arrows and say "Main Gate" on them.

Girl: Where's the main gate?

Somehow everyone got home. I don't know whether I'll be asked to do this again next year, but presumably by then I will have forgotten what a pain in the neck it was, so I'll probably do it.

Oh yeah, Hannah sang a solo. I thought she did well.

Back home, the girls have discovered the simple joys of badminton, which is fast becoming a staple of every trip to grandma's house. The most recent such trip was on Memorial Day, where we were joined by the customary mix of family and interesting people (interesting in a good way) in Mom and Dad's circle, which they're always looking to expand.

Our 14th wedding anniversary last Wednesday coincided with our monthly ward temple night, so Crystal and I made our way up to the sixth floor where we surprised Dad who was in the middle of a sealing session. As Crystal and I took our turn at the altar and listened to Dad perform the ordinances, my mind easily turned back to May 28, 1994, when, as Crystal and I knelt in a similar room in the same temple, my Grandpa Henrichsen uttered the same remarkable promises. Crystal and I barely recognize the 22- and 23-year-olds in our wedding pictures anymore, but remain enormously grateful for the covenants those two people made that bind us to a loving Heavenly Father and to one another. And to you. Have a nice month.



Right & Below: Grace at the strawberry patch.

(A dandelion's as good as a strawberry if you're Grace.)



Above: Lucy at Brighton Dam. (Click on the photo for more from Brighton Dam.)



Above: A flog made of (mostly white) cupcakes.

Right: Grace insisted on red



MARYLAND DAY 2008: University of Maryland



Hannah, Lucy and Sophie goof off in the fountain.

