

Dear Family,

It turns out among the most entertaining aspects of chaperoning middle-school students on a trip to Central Pennsylvania are the conversations you overhear during the two-hour bus ride (without really trying). I was a little surprised during last weekend's trip to Hershey when one of the topics turned to religion. "Why don't nuns get married?" one girl asked another. The second girl's response was kind of hard to follow, but the gist of it seemed to be that it was because nuns are "in the church," and in the church all the men are your brothers, and you can't marry your brother.

I suppose that's as good an explanation as any. It was once explained to me that nuns don't marry because they're all married in some manner to Deity. I don't know whether that's an accurate portrayal of Catholic doctrine, but if it is, it would seem to give my polygamist ancestors some cover.

The enlightening theological discussion on the bus reminded me of an even more entertaining conversation I overheard a couple of months ago standing in the checkout line at Magruder's. A couple of employees were discussing the matzos and other chametz-free seasonal fare they'd been putting on the shelves in preparation for Passover. One employee asked the other (loudly enough that I could hear several feet away) what all the Passover stuff was for, to which her co-worker confidently replied—without the slightest hint of sarcasm—that Passover was a Jewish celebration of the last week of Christ's life.

I don't know why I'm surprised that people are so misinformed about *my* religion when they can't even keep their facts straight about the big boys.

But anyway, the bus ride that kicked off this long tangent was occasioned by the annual trip of the Silver Spring International Middle School's chorus, bands, and orchestra to Hershey, Pa. to compete in a "Music in the Parks" festival (for a total of about 10 minutes) and then spend the rest of the day riding roller coasters at HersheyPark. If you read all my letters and any of this sound familiar, it's probably because we did the same thing last year. Like last year, I provided piano accompaniment for the chorus (in which Hannah sings). Like last year, they did fine. Like last year, shortly after the singing I was given responsibility for keeping track of a small group of sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade girls at the park. Like last year, two of the girls in my group had neither watches, nor cell phones, nor any inclination to ask anybody what time it was. Like last year, we somehow all got back to the bus at the end of the day. Like last year, I have no idea how.

Before we left, Lucy and Sophie made their customary requests that I bring them each back one of those giant, softball-sized Hershey's Kisses they sell all over the place up there. I seem to recall impatiently muttering something about how "I'd try to remember, but..."

Sophie then left the room without saying anything, and came back a short time later with a carefully handwritten reminder (see below). The note was cute enough, but then she began emptying her pockets of change. She handed the coins to me, one at time. Then she gazed up at me with her freckled, forlorn face and enormous brown eyes, and she had me. What's worse is that I think she knew she had me. I told her I'd remember to get her Kiss (even though I was pretty sure she'd stolen the money from me). She hasn't quite figured out yet that she gets light years more mileage out of her big brown eyes than she does out of incessant whining. But she might be closing in on it.

Lucy still likes to ask me language questions I don't have good answers for, like, "why isn't "naked" pronounced like "baked"?" (Me: "I don't know, Lucy. Because it's a stupid language.") But she's always looking for ways to expand her vocabulary, and sometimes her older sister helps. To understand the exchange below, you first have to understand Lucy's penchant for saying the word "Roar" (often with no emotion whatsoever) whenever something displeases her:

Hannah: Lucy, please stop that.

Lucy: Roar!

Hannah: Did you call me a whore?

Lucy: No, I said "Roar." What's a whore?

Hannah: Uhhh...

Lucy: Mom, what's a whore?

Crystal: Ask your father.

Me (Aside--listening from down the hall): &%\$#@!

Lucy: Dad, what's a whore?

Me: It's a woman who doesn't keep the commandments.

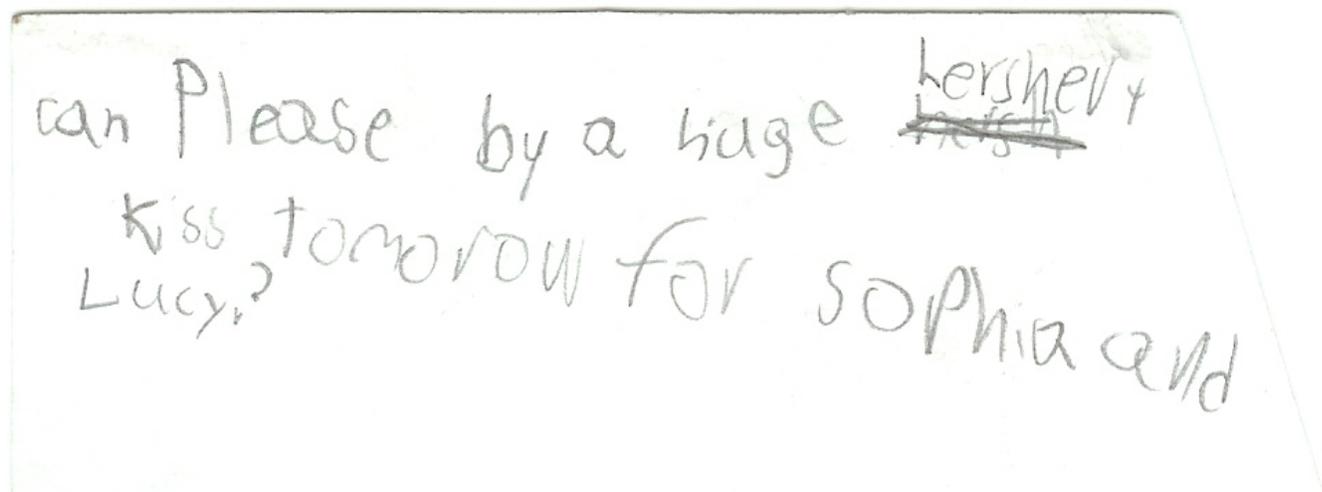
Crystal: That's probably *not* one for the Famlet.

Me: Okay.

I realize I didn't give a very precise answer, and I probably should have added that it isn't a term one uses in polite conversation. But it was the best I could do under the circumstances. For what it's worth, according to www.lds.org, the word (or forms of it) appears eight times in the Book of Mormon, twice in the Doctrine and Covenants and 37 times in the King James Bible. Frankly, I can't believe this is the first time the question's come up. In addition to building her vocabulary, Lucy continues to function as our resident enviro-nazi, and gives me a hard time for occasionally leaving the water running while I brush my teeth. [For my part, I don't quite understand how it's even possible to "waste" water during times when it isn't scarce. Is it possible to "store" water flowing down a river?] If it is, Lucy compensates for my carelessness by *never* flushing the toilet, so I think we more or less break even..



I'm riding my bike to work more often again now that it's warm. I usually do it at least once, but no more than twice a week. For an exciting photo-journal entry of my journey, [click here](#). The captions are long, but surprisingly informative! Have a nice month!



Sophie's heart-rending note.



Sophie and the president.
Not really, of course. This was done at one of the 8 million tourist traps downtown that churn out cheesy Photoshop jobs of you and President Rockstar.
I never thought I'd ever be one to plunk down seven bucks for something like this. But what can I tell you, Sophie absolutely loves the guy.



Hannah had a Spanish class assignment to prepare a food from a Spanish-speaking country, feed it to her family, and then photograph her family's reactions.

I think what she made was called a "Mexican Smoothie."

The name didn't instill me with great confidence as I seem to recall at one point having seen a silver-colored picture frame with a sticker on the front reading, "100% Mexican Pewter."

This was clarified by the sticker on the back.

It read: "100% Aluminum."

Hannah was supposed to take pictures of all of us, but I could only find these two.

Lucy seemed to enjoy hers.

You can't see the partially empty glass in my hand (nice shootin' Hannah!) but I'm pretty sure the translation of this facial expression is: "I'm glad I don't live in Mexico."