

Dear Family,

I'm happy to report that, after a year of imploring, Sophie has finally visited the White House and laid eyes on her idol, Barack Obama.

At least she thinks she has. While there is little question that she set foot in the White House (on a field trip earlier this month with all the other second graders in her school) it's less certain whether there was actually any visual contact with the president. The story goes that at one point during the tour, one of the chaperones believes she saw the president stepping off his helicopter and that he waved at them through the window of whatever room they were in. Subsequent conversations with Emily Warner—one of the chaperones and a former member of our ward—suggest that it isn't clear whether any of the children actually saw any of this, but all of them are certain they did, and everything else hardly matters.

I'm not familiar enough with the interior of the White House to know whether it's even possible to see Marine One's landing site from anyplace in the building that's part of the elementary school tour route. Sadly, in my line of work, the government building I'm most familiar with is the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development; an amazing building—as in, it's amazing that anyone could conceive of something so hideous—where no matter what floor you're on, it feels like you're two stories underground.

But anyway, that early Christmas present must have been sufficient because Sophie's letter to Santa asked for Silly Putty for her sisters (so they wouldn't have to keep stealing hers). I can't remember whether Santa came through on that, but Sophie did get the American Girl doll and accessories she wanted—[Molly McIntire](#) is her doll if you're keeping track—so she's happy. Sophie has constructed a bed for Molly out of the box she came in and, I believe, has slept on the floor next to her every night since Christmas.

The Christmas season brought with it the usual barrage of singing and cookies. Hannah and Sophie both participated in their respective school choral concerts, and Lucy even soloed in hers. My father is happy to learn that Crystal and I have foisted the Christmas caroling/cookie delivery tradition—which I so strenuously resisted as a boy—upon my own children (even though I still don't enjoy it all that much). We basically hit the ten or so houses on our block/cul-de-sac (if you look up our address on Zillow.com or a site like it, you'll see what I mean) and some families I home teach. We've done it enough years now that all the neighbors have come to expect it and most are prepared with gifts of their own for us.

The most touching of these came from Mr. Varone, the friendly widower who lives four doors down from us. He invited us in (a kind gesture that I typically can do without because it just slows down the whole production, but in this case I didn't mind so much.) He had us sit down in his living room and then excused himself so he could retrieve something from his basement. He emerged a short time later with a

large bag full of scarves, mittens and hats crocheted by his late wife and asked whether the girls would like to have them. The girls, of course, were more than eager to take them, but Crystal and I, thinking about the considerable sentimental value these objects must hold and the fact that our family loses an average of one pair of mittens every week, were reluctant. But Mr. Varone was insistent, saying that his children didn't want them and he'd really like us to have them. And so we took them. The whole scene was oddly reminiscent of Mr. Krueger's Christmas—except we didn't get any hot chocolate, and Mr. Varone didn't join us on the remainder of our caroling route.

The hats and scarves were pressed into the service the following night when grandma and grandpa took the girls caroling around their neighborhood. Predictably, one of the scarves was lost along the route, but happily, grandma was able to retrace steps the following day and was somehow able to find it amid the two feet of snow on the ground.

Which brings me to what made this Christmas unusual: the two feet of snow that fell the weekend prior. We very seldom see significant snowfall in December, and this storm reportedly broke records. The storm forced the cancellation of church services for the first time in my 188 weeks as bishop (not that I'm counting, but there are 260 weeks in 5 years—not that that means anything, which I'm told it doesn't). The unusualness of it all resulted in a borderline-comical e-mail exchange between the stake president and me, with my trying to convince him that the decision to cancel Sunday services rested with the stake and his delegating the decision back to the bishops, before ultimately reclaiming it early Saturday afternoon and instructing all of us to cancel everything.

While waiting for final decisions to be made and announced, Crystal suggested that I call a couple of the older men in the ward (who have a tendency to act younger than they are) and tell them that services the next day were likely to be cancelled and so they shouldn't do anything stupid, like try to clear their own walks and driveways. This made sense to me, so I called them to let them (and their wives) know that they were under a bishop's directive not to shovel their walks. This apparently touched one of the men's wives enough that she later told Crystal about how her husband had been to the hospital earlier that week with chest pains and an irregular heartbeat and how the bishop wouldn't have had any way of knowing that and how inspired he must have been to call. I don't think Crystal told her that the bishop was just listening to his wife, but there's probably a lesson in that. There are lots of good reasons why bishops have to be married. This is just one.

The snow, which ended by early Sunday, was enough to close schools for the next three days (yep, insert laugh track here) resulting in a 16-day winter recess. It also meant that the Christmas sermon, which I began writing in a hotel room in Pittsburgh and mostly finished writing in a hotel room in Atlanta, didn't get delivered until the Sunday *after* Christmas. No one seemed to mind either thing. We somehow got tithing settlement done, and I'm happy.

We hope your holidays have been happy, as well.
Love, Tim *et al.*





Lucy singing her solo at the Forest Knolls Elementary School Chorus Winter Concert



Sophie and Grace with Santa at the Ward Christmas Party



Sunday morning: Don't tell the Pharisees, but instead of worshiping, the old bishop was just trying to clear a path across his deck to get to his garbage cans. (Note how the snow came up well above my knees.)



Christmas Eve: Cookies and milk for Santa (more than he could eat)



A good catch-all Christmas picture: Hannah holding an Apple gift card (she received several to complement the iPod Touch she got for her birthday earlier in the month) with a bunch of her sisters' opened American Girl boxes in the background.