

Dear Family,

Ever since she was a girl Crystal has been a fan of "family" holidays. Which is to say that ever since she was a girl Crystal has been a fan of made-up holidays.

I believe it was she who, throughout her youth, insisted each year on commemorating the summer day on which her family moved to Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. This tradition appears to have started as an excuse for Crystal to demand that her parents take the family out to dinner, but eventually morphed into more elaborate events, such as taking the boat out on the lake and listening to Crystal's dad gripe about all the new ex-Californians that'd moved into town during the past year. (That last part probably didn't actually happen, but for a UCLA grad whose siblings all still live in California, he sure likes to tee off on its former residents. Remember when [Mark Fuhrman](#) moved to Sandpoint? Just one more idiot Californian contributing to overcrowding in North Idaho. Drives Crystal's dad nuts.)

I mention Crystal's affinity for made-up holidays because this coming Wednesday will mark the 10th anniversary of our family's indebtedness, which also coincides with the purchase of our first and only house. As I'm sure you recall, my letter to you on April 2, 2000, opened with the line, "For the first time in our lives, we're in debt..." I went on to write of the unease of having taken on such a substantial personal liability, and then, later in the same eclectic one-page letter, take potshots at General Conference, the National Rifle Association, and the Church of Global Warming. (If you don't believe me, you can look it up on this site's [oldies](#) page.)

Ten years later, I regret to report that we're still in debt. Worse yet, our mortgage balance is more than double what it was in 2000, thanks to the great 2004 addition and remodel (as you doubtless recall from my letter of June 27, 2004, which you can also find on the [oldies](#) page). I draw a limited amount of solace from the knowledge that the mortgage is our only debt. But mortgage debt is still debt, and 18½ years under my father's roof taught me not just to abhor debt but to fear it. "Mortgage," as you perhaps know, derives in part from the French word "mort," meaning "dead." As such, I view my mortgage as something to kill before it buries me...

...I should stop here to point out that this sort of talk drives Crystal up the wall. "People have mortgages; get over it," she said to me earlier this week. Which is interesting because she's every bit as debt-averse as I am, not to mention a far more judicious spender. I guess I should listen to her; she's been right about everything else so far.

And so, as we prepare to observe this Wednesday's family holiday, it's hard to believe it's been 10 years. Even with the addition, it's a fairly modest place (relative to a lot of places, including the houses in which Crystal and I were reared) but it works for us, and we're very grateful to have it.

Grace, who wasn't yet born at the time of our house's purchase or renovation, turned 5 this week. Her conflicted emotions in the weeks leading up to her birthday were evidenced by statements like, "I want to be a baby for-

ever; but I want to turn 5." She goes back and forth between not wanting to be called a baby and insisting that people call her a baby. We've never before had a child reach even the age of 3 without having a younger sibling (Sophie held the previous record at 2 years 11 months) so I don't know if these emotions stem from being a big kid, but still the youngest, or what. But she's still very cute, even though she lies *all the time*. (I understand this is normal.)

Her birthday party was the usual blend of cousins, church friends, and pre-school classmates (with no overlap among the three groups). Her pre-K class is an interesting blend of half special-needs kids and half non-special-needs kids. (I'm not always sure which group Grace should be in.) It was fun watching Crystal struggle with the best way to integrate "we can accommodate your disabled child" into the party invitations. (I can't remember exactly how she ended up wording it; I think it was better than that.) The invitations yielded eight children, including one girl with a walker, and two of the three boys from school Grace insisted on inviting "because they're so handsome."

I think the pre-K experience has been a good one for Grace. Even though our principal criteria (cost, location, and schedule) haven't changed, our four daughters have wound up having four entirely different pre-school experiences. They've all been fine (if annoying at times), and maybe this is just the big brother of a 27-year-old special needs "child" talking, but I think there's just something unusually good about interacting with such a physically diverse group of kids at such a young age. I feel a similar sense of satisfaction when I look out the window and see the girls playing, as they frequently do, with the kids on the block whose parents hail from Africa, Southeast Asia, India, and elsewhere—kids just playing with other kids, having absolutely no idea how radically different their parents' upbringings were from one another...

...blah, blah, blah. We picked the pre-K program (not to mention our neighborhood) because we liked the location and the price was right—which is more than I can say for Hannah's and Lucy's fall/winter swim league, which finally wrapped this week with a meet where Hannah held her own in the tough-as-nails 13-and-up division, swimming free, back, and I.M. while her mother "timed." Crystal's timing duties were largely ceremonial, as the time on her stopwatches would only factor in if the fancy-pants touch pads in the pool *and* the automated back-up timing system both failed. None of this beyond-stopwatch technology gets used in our summer swim league where everything's a little more laid back (only a little) and the meets are far more enjoyable (i.e., much shorter).

Finally, the girls and their mother went to PetSmart earlier this month to purchase the promised hamsters (see [last month's letter](#)). They came home with two (allegedly male) gerbils instead. They were convinced by the sales guy, however, that gerbils are better with younger children than hamsters are. Which means either that gerbils are better for younger children than hamsters are, or that PetSmart was trying to clear out a surplus of (allegedly male)

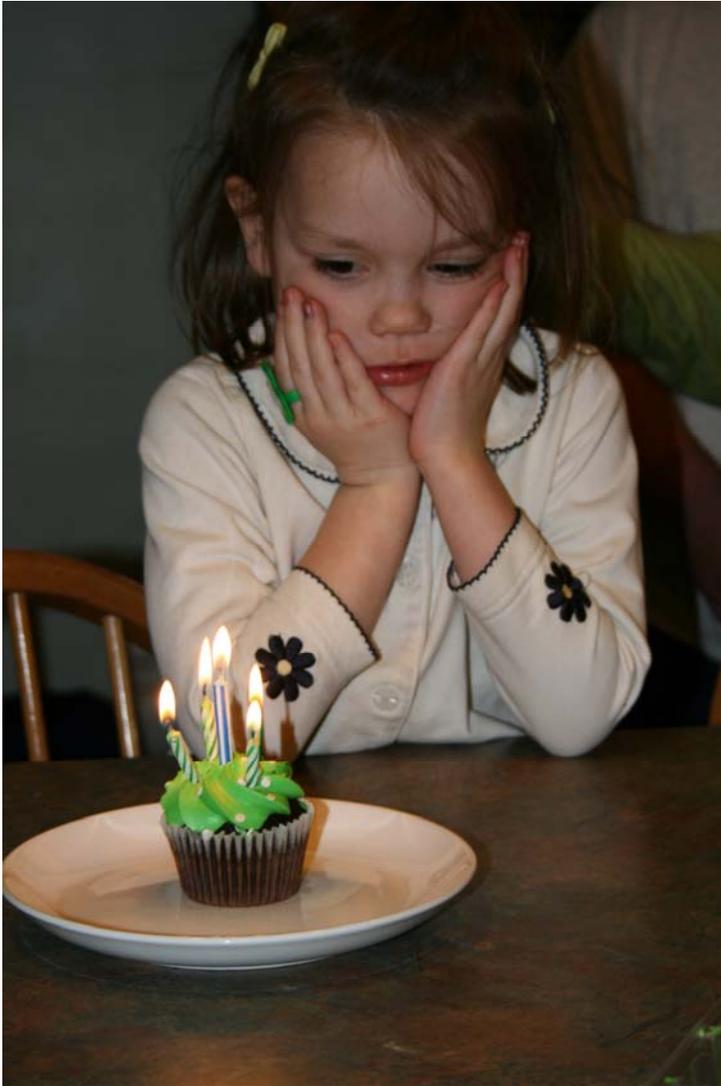


gerbils. Either way, the gerbils, named Moffatt and Fluffernutter, now reside in Hannah's bedroom. I can't smell them and only rarely see them, so I'm happy. Lucy's bedroom is a disaster again, but what are you gonna do?

Happy Spring. Love, Tim et al.

Sophie likes to walk on her tip-toes anyway, so she now takes dance lessons.





Grace (age 5): “You call that a birthday cake?”



Lucy and Grace
(yet another example of Grace’s standard look-how-wide-I-can-open-my-eyes camera pose)

Ten Years on Hannes Street

April 2004 (just before the addition). Essentially as it looked on March 31, 2000.

We still have that Toyota Sienna in the driveway.



A house in our neighborhood we told the contractor we wanted our house to look like.

February 2010
(under two feet of snow)

