

Dear Family,

Raise your hand if you've ever been to see *Wicked* on Broadway.

Yeah, me neither, but my three oldest daughters (and their mother) now have—the central event of their whirlwind 48-hour Manhattan adventure earlier this month.

Everybody should have an Aunt Coco. Among Coco's many interesting friends are a married couple who live walking distance from Lower Manhattan and, once each year in the summertime, ask her to house-sit for them while they travel (or something like that—you'll have to get the details from her). Earlier this year, contemplating her summer excursion to the city, she asked whether Crystal and the older girls would like to join her for a couple of days and perhaps take in a show. Crystal and the girls have been *Wicked*-philes for some time (you could be forgiven for concluding that it's the only music on Crystal's iPod, based on the frequency with which it plays and re-plays throughout the day around the house). And so the only real deliberation was around how to sell me on the notion of being Grace's mom for two nights (while ostensibly working from home).

Surprising everybody (including myself) I didn't put up much fuss over it. I was initially inclined to balk at the price of tickets (four of them ran about \$500) until I remembered how much I'd just shelled out for the privilege of attending the U.S. Open when it comes to Congressional next June. (It's remarkable how downright affordable other things sound when you frame them in the context of golf.) Transportation didn't cost much either. As everybody around here knows, the best way to get to New York is by bus (that is, if you're going on your own dime—which I never do, which is why I always take the train). But bus fare from here to New York is cheaper than cab fare from home to the airport. Plus, you get your very own bathroom that you only have to share with 47 other people. That's way better than flying economy!

Grandma Christine accompanied Crystal, Hannah, Lucy, and Sophie on the trip up, and, by all accounts, everybody had a great time. Curtain was at 7:00, and they spent most of the day doing things that likely would have prompted me to cast myself into the East River had I been there. These included lunch at the American Girl store café (where, it appears from the photos, they actually have little seats attached to the table where the \$@#% dolls can sit—and yes, the girls actually hauled their American Girl dolls up there with them; I'm not sure whether any actual food needed to be purchased for them). There also appears to have been an inordinate amount of time (and I don't know how much money—but probably less than a new TaylorMade R9 SuperTri driver costs) spent in the Harry Potter section of F.A.O. Schwarz.

But they all loved it, and perhaps more important, they all loved the show. Even Sophie, who I think we feared might not have the stamina for it, but that was never a problem. Sophie loved it so much, she felt she needed to

e-mail me on her way home to tell me in painstaking detail what happens in the end (or, more precisely, what doesn't happen) to Elphaba (who I understand is the Wicked Witch of the West—though, believe me, I couldn't care less).

Grace and I did just fine home alone, thank you very much. We had some help from Grandpa, who took her to McDonald's and to his house for a good chunk of Tuesday afternoon, enabling me to jump on a few conference calls and get some actual work done. My temporary domestic responsibilities also gave me an excuse to hold Tuesday night bishopric meeting around my dining room table (causing me to wonder why I don't just do that every week). Grace and I had our own Family Home Evening the night before, which involved biking to downtown Silver Spring and picking up dinner and milkshakes at Chick-fil-A. The next evening, we walked through the woods to California Tortilla for dinner. I think we had Dunkin' Donuts for breakfast both mornings. Crystal was impressed by the cleanliness of the kitchen upon her return. I don't remember if I told her that Grace and I hadn't really set foot in there in two days. The hardest adjustment for Grace following the return of her mother might have been having to move back to her own bed. (Turns out sharing a king-size bed with five-year-old Grace was not nearly as straightforward as I had anticipated—she was *all over the place*. It was nice to have her mother back—she hardly moves at all.)

The girls got home in time for the Wednesday night B-meet. I can't remember what happened (or even who swam what, though I think Grace swam the little-kid kickboard event—a B-meet classic!) but I do know for sure that summer swim league season wraps up this morning with Hannah swimming four events (backstroke, breaststroke, butterfly, and individual medley) in the divisional championship meet. I'm sorry to miss it in part because it means I'll miss watching Hannah's "bucket turn" (a move for transitioning between the backstroke and breaststroke legs of the I.M. where the swimmer, after touching the wall (on her back) with her hand, flips her knees up, swivels onto her front and kicks off the wall—it's pretty cool to watch, but I've seen her do it before). Lucy and Sophie get the week off, but they both had good summers as well, dropping significant time in all of their events. It's fun watching all three of them develop and get better, and remembering when Hannah's backstroke looked more like Sophie's (characterized by rapid little propeller-like arms flailing through the air) before developing into the longer, more rhythmic stroke she uses now.

Finally, at the risk of boring you by talking about the weather, it's been really, really hot and humid for a really, really long time. I realize that doesn't sound like breaking news for late July, but it just seems really, really bad this year, even for us. The term I used to use for weather like this is "*Africa hot*." I stopped using that term a week or two ago when Crystal asked our next-door neighbor (from Ghana) how this heat compares with the weather where he's from. His response—"this is much worse"—has caused me to wonder whether especially oppressive days in Africa cause people there to say, "Man, it is *Maryland hot* out there today!"

Hope you're staying cool. Love, Tim *et al.*



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With Grandma, after *Wicked*.



Lucy and Coco (and Kit) at the American Girl Café.



I don't know anything about the context of this picture of Sophie (other than that it was obviously taken in New York). The only thing of which I'm certain is that two seconds before this picture was snapped, Sophie was crying furiously. I know this expression anywhere. This is Sophie's patented "I'm really upset, but somebody's pointing a camera at me, so I better try and smile" face.

Seen it a million times. (Love it!)



And finally, a picture for you who say I don't post enough pictures of myself. That's me on the ground (red shirt, white shorts, bald spot) tackling Mike West after he scored a goal during an impromptu soccer game that broke out on the front lawn of the church during our ward's, ahem, 3rd of July breakfast earlier this month. Hey Reed, do you remember Sam Brien? That's him on the left (hunched over).