

**Dear Family,**

On the back of each kelly green commemorative t-shirt, above a map of the United States roughly depicting our route, are printed the words in which we seek to sum it all up: "four girls...one mom...three weeks...one minivan...5,446 miles...one grumpy dad."

In his family letter last month, dad described my family's then-forthcoming trans-continental road trip as "epic." His word choice made me smile. "Epic" is one of those interesting adjectives that (like "awesome" a generation ago) I think means something slightly different to people in their 60's than it does to people in their 20's. This creates confusion for those of us in the middle, but he might have been correct in both senses of the word.

Some last-minute changes to the itinerary rendered the shirts inaccurate in at least a couple of respects. The original plan (as depicted on the shirts) had us driving from Silver Spring to Boise by way of Palmyra, N.Y., Kirtland, Ohio, Nauvoo, Ill. and Independence, Mo. We did all of that except for the Independence part, which got scratched in favor of Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. When the dust settled, we had in fact driven 6,208 miles—more than 10 percent of the total mileage (61,910) currently logged on our 2004 Toyota Sienna. And we'd done it in just a little over two weeks. And, what's more, I think we'd do it again.

Indeed—and I believe Crystal would concur with this—I wasn't nearly as grumpy as either of us feared, nor did I have much cause to be. Female bladder requirements remain wholly beyond my comprehension, but I eventually learned to cope.

Here's the condensed travelogue (for a more complete version, feel free to attend our next fast and testimony meeting):

**Palmyra** (July 26-27): We drove there from home (7 hours due north) and slept at the Palmyra Inn (ridiculously overpriced, but conveniently located—walking distance from the Palmyra Temple, Smith farm, and Sacred Grove). We did all that, of course, as well as Cumorah, Grandin, and the Peter Whitmer farm.

**Kirtland** (July 28): We drove the four hours southwest from Palmyra on the afternoon of July 27 and spent two nights (and 30,000 Marriott points) at a nearby Courtyard. The 50-minute tour of the Kirtland Temple was about 35 minutes too long for our team, but we still enjoyed seeing it. From there we went to the Church's visitors' center and surrounding historic village, where we took the tour of the Whitney store and home, and the sawmill and ashery. Pursuant to an amusing sequence of events (which I lack the space and patience to recount here) our family wound up having a pair of young sister missionaries all to ourselves for the tour. They were superb and we had a great time.

**Nauvoo** (July 29-31): It takes essentially all day to drive from Kirtland to Nauvoo. We rolled into town in time to hit the dinner buffet at the Hotel Nauvoo (even though we were sleeping at the Zions Mercantile Hotel—a great little place, caddy corner from the temple, that is both superior to and less expensive than the Palmyra Inn) and to catch the Nauvoo Pageant that night. The girls enjoyed the pre-pageant pioneer activities so much that we went again the next night. That was when we lost Grace (another amusing story, too long for this letter, that involved pageant security, sister missionaries, and golf carts—it would've helped if Grace had been wearing one of her

kelly green commemorative t-shirts (we each had two), but this was one of several occasions on which she refused to because she prefers the way she looks in a dress). The girls loved just about everything we did in Nauvoo. We were sad when we had to leave, but we got our nail rings, our Nauvoo brick, lots of chigger bites, and our memories, and I expect we'll be back.

**Coeur d'Alene** (Aug. 1-4): It's roughly 24 hours of drive time from Nauvoo to Coeur d'Alene. We left Nauvoo around noon Saturday, at which point the girls began lobbying to drive straight through without stopping. Crystal and I entertained this notion for a while before opting to sleep in Murdo, S.D. We started early enough the next morning to get off of I-90 for about an hour, drive through the Badlands; and still make it to Rapid City just in time to catch a 9:00 a.m. sacrament meeting.

We arrived in Coeur d'Alene late that night, and spent the next two and a half days with Grandma and Grandpa Kent, mostly on the boat and at the Silverwood amusement park. They were wonderful hosts, and we (again) were sad to have to leave so soon.

**Boise** (and environs—Aug. 4-8): It would be fair to say that none of this would have happened were it not for the Mullinix family reunion (descendents of Crystal's maternal grandparents) which took place in and somewhat near Boise. But first we had to get to Boise from Coeur d'Alene—a 7-hour due-south off-Interstate drive that is both beautiful and aggravating. It was during this stretch that I had the trip's one and only encounter with law enforcement. It seems I didn't slow down enough on US-95 entering the town of New Meadows. The ensuing story—involving Sheriff Yokum and, subsequently, the guy running the nearby A&W stand—is hilarious, but sadly, too lengthy to recount here. (Sheriff Yokum let me off with a warning.)

We eventually made it to Boise, where we were put up for two nights by Crystal's Aunt JoAnn and Uncle Bob. They were delightful, as was everybody else I met at the Mullinix reunion. Activities in Boise included ice blocking down a large hill and floating the Boise River (on tubes). The following day the reunion moved to the home of Crystal's Uncle Roland and Aunt Cindy outside of Weiser (which, for reasons that escape me, is pronounced "Wheezzer"). The family fun there was wide-ranging and included shooting big guns at stuff. I eventually hit a clay pigeon (on my fifth try) and immediately announced my retirement. We spent the next two nights sleeping in tents on the beach of some reservoir whose name I can never remember (and still have yet to be able to find on any map—I'm pretty sure it exists, but don't bother trying to use your phone there).

We went to church in Cambridge and set off on the 2,500-mile journey home. At the girls' insistence, we ate in the car and stopped only to sleep: Sunday night in Rawlins, Wyo. and Monday night in Iowa City. We arrived home just after midnight Wednesday morning.

Then our power went out for 60 hours thanks to a bizarre and extraordinarily violent morning thunderstorm that brought down large trees all over the neighborhood, including one on top of the house two doors down from us, but that's another story.

Everybody starts school on Monday, and Hannah starts seminary next week. For everyone but Sophie, it's the first year at a new school. I'll try to remember to let you know how that's going in next month's letter. In the meantime, I hope this finds you well.

Love, Tim et al.

