

Dear Family,

Greetings from Montgomery County, Maryland, where we pay our crossing guards \$41.50 an hour (plus benefits) and I still can never get that charming woman ferrying kids across Caddington to smile at me.

A lot of parents probably wouldn't let their 13-year-old freshman daughter go out to a concert on a school night. If you're one of those parents, you might want to skip to the next paragraph. The event Hannah attended on Wednesday night ("concert" probably isn't the right word) was at the Apollo Theater. (Yes, *that* Apollo Theater—the one on 125th Street in Harlem.) If I have the story right, one of the boys in her CAP program was playing the guitar in an Amateur Night finals competition. Because audience response was one of the criteria factoring into who won the \$10,000 first prize, the boy's parents chartered a bus to New York in the hope of packing the crowd with CAP students—and, allegedly, a few teachers/chaperones. (Apparently the strategy worked; the boy reportedly tied for first and rode home 5 grand richer.) It seems Hannah had a lot of fun. Four hours each way on the bus meant she got back to the school at 2:30 Thursday morning—Crystal picked her up, thank you very much—which got Hannah into bed in plenty of time to be awakened by her 5 a.m. alarm for seminary. One of the conditions for going on the adventure was that she not miss seminary the next day, where, two months into the year, she is one of only three students with 100 percent attendance. (One of the others is Caroline Kemper, a senior in CAP, who drives Hannah to seminary and school each day.) Hannah is a very good girl. And when she grows up I hope she turns out like Caroline Kemper.

[I've now had Hannah review the preceding paragraph for accuracy. Other than pointing out one pronoun with an unclear antecedent (which I've since fixed) she said it was fine.]

The academic quarter ended on Friday. Hannah (her mother's child) is getting all As. Lucy (her father's child in so many ways it's frightening) isn't, but has been moving in the right direction in recent weeks. (Sophie and Grace don't get real grades, but they also appear to be doing okay.)

One quarter in, Lucy is still adjusting to middle school. Among the things she misses about elementary school are all the holiday celebrations. That means no Halloween party. That means no costumes. That means one disappointed Lucy. Fortunately, on the Friday before Halloween, her school had a "Team Spirit Day," on which students were permitted to wear team apparel (including hats, which are ordinarily forbidden). Lucy opted for a swim team t-shirt and asked a teacher if she would be allowed to wear a swim cap to complete the theme. The teacher replied that that would be permitted, but reminded Lucy that she was in middle school and that wearing something like that could make her the target of ridicule. If anything, this only made Lucy want to wear the swim cap even more. And so she wore it.

I think I'm allowed to tell you that Crystal turned 40 this month. The event passed with little fanfare other than a small family get-together. (She did get an iPad, so *that* made her happy.) Not much has changed since then, except that I've taken more opportunities than usual to tell everybody I know that Crystal is older than me. (She really appreciates

that.)

Her response when asked whether she feels older seems to depend on the day. She continues to run 20 miles every week (and swim, and lift weights, and go to Pilates, and...). She claims to feel "creakier" than usual, but this probably has more to do with the spill she took while running the week before her birthday. I think the hardest thing for her to swallow was when the mother of one of Lucy's friends stopped by last week (to drop off a math assignment for Lucy who was home sick). "I heard you had a birthday. *You're only 40?*" the friend's mother asked incredulously. It was at that point that I excused myself from the conversation (mostly so I could laugh by myself and write down what had just transpired). But the two old ladies continued their conversation for another half-hour, so presumably everything's okay.

With her advanced age has come increased wisdom in dealing with her daughters' reckless ultimatums. One of Grace's favorites is, "If you don't stop being mean to me, I'll run away." Similar ultimatums issued by Grace's older sisters might have elicited a more sympathetic response from their mother. Now her fairly standard response is, "I hope you don't, but if you do I'll miss you." Grace's response to this response is almost invariably, "But I'll be sad, too." Then she starts crying. Then she changes her ultimatum to something like "You better be nice to me or I'll leave all the lights on in the house." (As if she doesn't do that anyway.)

Because I now mail copies of this letter to two family members serving full-time missions, I thought I'd devote yet another paragraph to missionary work in the White Oak Ward. Remember the retired Washington DC police detective who was baptized last month? He's still great, and he's about to start as our Webelos leader. He'll also be baptizing his wife and 11-year-old daughter next week. So how about that? A couple of weeks ago I also got to participate in the baptismal service of an Ethiopian man who awoke one Sunday morning last month with an impression that he ought to go to "The Church of Jesus Christ" (his words). So he got dressed to do that. But his car wouldn't start. So he called a cab. The cab took him to the temple, where he arrived at around 7:00 a.m. He got out of the cab only to learn that the temple is closed on Sundays. By then it had started to rain. He walked around the grounds in the rain until 9:45, when a missionary arrived to prepare the visitors' center for its usual 10:00 opening. The missionary invited the man into the center, where it was subsequently determined that the man lived in the White Oak Ward. This was fortuitous since the sister missionaries who serve in and attend our ward also work at the visitors' center. They taught him—some at the visitors' center, but mostly at the home of a family in our ward. He was baptized a month later and confirmed last Sunday. Now I just need to interview him for the Aaronic Priesthood and ask him how one makes that Ethiopian spongy bread that looks like rolled-up washcloths.

We're off to Grandma's tonight for Halloween dinner and our monthly "big FHE." This, I'm informed, will be followed by some limited trick-or-treating in their neighborhood. I'm weary of all the discussion of whether this is a Sabbath-appropriate activity. Not that my opinion matters, but I'm no longer able to see what's so offensive about walking around the neighborhood on Sunday, visiting neighbors and exchanging treats. Is it really all that different from Christmas caroling?

Okay, don't answer that. But, have a nice month!

Love, Tim *et al.*





Crystal (age 40) unwraps a present (wrapped in the obits).



Princess Grace and Spider-Man (one of her boyfriends).



Sophie (as death eater Bellatrix Lestrange)



Lucy also had a birthday this month. She's 11.