

Dear Family,

Thanksgiving dinner was rather ordinary.

That sounds like an unfairly pejorative way of referring to a very nice meal that I had no hand in preparing, but I don't mean it pejoratively.

What I mean is, sitting around Grandma and Grandpa's dining room table on Thanksgiving afternoon, it occurred to me how not unusual everything felt. I sat at the grown-ups table between Crystal and Peter, across from Grant & Jen and Richard & JoAnn. Mom, Dad, and Aunt Coco filled out the table, while the 14 minor children were mainly relegated to their traditional places around tables in the kitchen and family room. None of this felt special (which is to say it wasn't unusual) because of the frequency with which I break bread with all of these people.

Just three weeks earlier, essentially the same group, plus several more, gathered in southern Maryland to witness Nate Henrichsen's baptism and to eat lots of food at his house. The food, both there and on Thanksgiving, was very good, but it always is. So was the company, but it always is. So when I say Thanksgiving was ordinary, I guess I'm speaking of how commonplace it has become for me to enjoy bounteous meals in the company of large groups of close family members I like being around. And that in itself is something for which I am immensely thankful.

Our 26-person Thanksgiving gathering was smaller than usual. Matt and his family stayed in Raleigh, where they presumably discussed principles of oral hygiene over turkey and sugar-free pie. I'd be curious to learn how Andrew's family celebrated the day in Switzerland. (I guess I could check their blog, but that's a lot of work.) As I recall, the two Thanksgivings I spent in France passed largely without my notice. (I suppose I could check my journal entries from 18 and 19 years ago, but that's a lot of work.)

I'm thankful for the apparent goodness of my daughters.

Earlier this month, it was my privilege in sacrament meeting to present Hannah with her Young Womanhood Recognition award (and attendant medallion). It's a noteworthy achievement for any young woman, and an unusual one for a 13-year-old. Hannah's was the fifth neck around which I've hung a YW Recognition medallion this year—the other four have gone to two 17-year-old Laurels and two adult leaders. (I don't really put it around their necks, by the way; I actually just reach into my suit coat pocket, pray that I remembered to put the necklace in there, and hand it to the recipient, but you know what I mean...) I'm gratified by Hannah's faithfulness in completing all her Personal Progress requirements at such a young age, and—more important—by Hannah's commitment to keep the covenants she has made and her preparation to make temple covenants.

My observation of an admittedly small sample population suggests a strong correlation between girls who earn YW Recognition medallions and women who make temple covenants. Just yesterday, as we walked out of Sealing Room 8 in the Washington DC Temple, Crystal and I were two of a couple dozen people to get a hug from the smiling young bride, Judith Ovalles—a delightful young woman whom I got to know well first as her seminary teacher, then as her bishop (hers is another neck around which I hung a YW Recognition medallion, figuratively speaking). I'm smart enough not to take any credit

for other people's goodness, but it sure is fun to be able to watch it unfold from such a good seat. My primary hope at this stage in my life is to be able to watch it unfold that way for each of my daughters. It makes me happy that Hannah is off to such a good start, establishing a pattern her sisters can follow.

Hannah also made the Montgomery Blair High School swim team this month. We haven't yet figured out the logistics of getting to and from practice, but we're happy for her.

I'm thankful for Lucy, who has found an outlet for her anxiety in a weekly yoga class that she thoroughly enjoys. Lucy was home sick from school when Fluffernutter (one of the girls' two gerbils) died earlier this month. Lucy was the lead mourner, writing several bits of poetry in memory of her fallen friend. The gerbil, the poetry, and several other mementos were lovingly placed in a box and buried in the wood behind the house. Personally, I'd forgotten we even had gerbils, but it was touching to watch the girls console one another.

Lucy sat next to me (and drank most of my soda) during our family's (everyone but Grace) outing to Silver Spring's brand new IMAX theater to see Part 1 of the Harry Potter finale. (I can't believe those Warner Bros. dirt bags are making us wait till the summer for Part 2. I don't read a lot of fiction, but I absolutely love the last 200 pages of *Deathly Hallows*, and I can't wait to see how it get screen adapted, and did I mention *I can't believe those dirt bags are making me wait till the summer!*) Lucy also sat next to me (and her grandma) at Friday night's Olney Theater Center's production of *Annie*. It was nice. Lucy and I are pals.

I'm thankful for Sophie, even though I learned this month that I'm going to have to cough up another \$4,000 for braces. This, after recently laying out similar sums for her older sisters' orthodontia—did I mention that my employee dental plan stinks? I can't really complain, though, about a job that enables me to pay for it myself without going into hock. (Not that I'll ever feel comfortable about my financial situation while I still have a mortgage. One hundred seventy-three more payments to go!) By the way, we've received exactly one holiday card so far this season. It's from Bethesda Dental Specialties—the girls' orthodontist. The card should have been a picture of a brand new boat with "THANKS" in big bold letters across it. It wasn't.

Sophie also recently joined a local Brownie troop. She loves it, and we're all looking forward to cookie season (sort of). Sophie's troop marched in our local little Silver Spring Thanksgiving parade last Saturday, which gave our family an excuse to see the parade for the first time ever. It was fun for a while, but eventually got old, and we ended up leaving early. Fortunately, Sophie's troop was near the head of the parade, right in front of the Washington Redskins Marching Band. (Does your local NFL team have a marching band? Unless your local NFL team is the Redskins or the Ravens, it doesn't.)

I'm thankful for Grace even though she cheats at Candy Land. She's not the best cheater, but whenever she gets a card she doesn't like, she launches into a long-winded explanation of why that particular card doesn't apply to her in this specific situation. When the argument fails, she just moves her marker wherever she wants it to be. She's still cute enough to get away with it. (She'll probably always be.)

I'm thankful to be related to you, and hope your holiday season is pleasant.

Love,

Tim et al.





Sophie, goofy-faced, at the Thanksgiving Parade

Hannah—photography student—had the camera for most of the parade. As a result, we have lots of “artistic” pictures like this.



We also have several of Grace picking her nose. Feel free to send Hannah an e-mail if you'd like her to do your wedding.