

Dear Family,

A week or two ago Grace announced that she was feeling very "absent." Further questioning enabled us to ascertain that she was claiming not to feel well and was applying a word she'd heard at school that she assumed was synonymous with "sick." It reminded me of the time when I couldn't figure out why my second grade teacher always referred to the bathroom as the "laboratory." We'd recently moved to New Jersey, and I just figured that was the way people in New Jersey referred to the can. I don't know how long it was (it could have been years) before I figured out that she was saying "lavatory," which, in my defense, is as stupid a word as one could ever apply to a kids bathroom.

"Lavatory" derives from the Latin *lavare* "to wash." So, etymologically speaking, a "lavatory" is a washroom. And of the many things that transpired in my elementary school "lavatory," washing was among the least common. (Seems we were more likely to engage in some form of bathing, if you know what I mean.)

Faithful readers of these letters know that I occasionally open with a brief description of my whereabouts (e.g., seat 4A on US Airways flight 84 to Seattle). These openings are not meant as annoying "wish you were here" postcards designed to make you feel jealous. (Not that anyone would. I never go anyplace very interesting—my average "on location" Famlet dateline is probably a hotel room in Pittsburgh.) Rather, I usually begin this way simply because I simply can't think of a more creative opening than, "coming to you live from the Amtrak Northeast Regional train 182 to New York....."

And it is in that spirit that I inform you that this is likely the only letter I've ever written in the White Oak Ward bishop's office between tithing settlement appointments. Some people (including me) enjoy pointing out that this is the very office that was occupied in the 1970s by a young [D. Todd Christofferson](#) when he was bishop of what was then the Rock Creek Ward. I imagine the carpet and furniture have been changed a couple of times, and I've since added a small refrigerator and a large whiteboard, but I wouldn't be surprised if some of the artwork is the same.

I'm also the first occupant of this office to have Internet access. The building (which is also our stake center) went wireless a year or two ago, to the delight of ward members (including one in whose house I live) who like to make full use of their iPads during sacrament meeting without tapping into their monthly 3G allowance. The network's WEP code is probably the biggest open secret in the stake (it's written fairly conspicuously on my whiteboard) but the signal in this particular room isn't very good. Fortunately, both this office and the adjoining clerks' office have Ethernet jacks. Life's good.

I'm writing here and now because I don't know when else I'd do it. Since the beginning of November I've been utterly consumed by an overwhelming client project that absolutely, positively must be finished by the end of the year, and even now I can't say whether we'll make it. It's one of those projects that I'm ostensibly managing even though (or perhaps because) I'm clearly the dumbest guy on the team—a team that includes two finance Ph.D.'s and several other genuinely good people who are a delight to work with, even under difficult circumstances.

Since you asked (oh, you didn't?) the project involves evaluating a certain bank's income simulation and fixed-income asset valuation financial models. And unless the concepts of bond duration and convexity mean anything to you (or even if they do) there isn't much more I can write that could possibly hold your attention. (Not because you aren't smarter than me, which I'm sure you are; it just isn't very interesting subject matter.) Crystal's dad (or it might have been Karel) called earlier this month to ask Crystal what I do for a living so they could put it in their Christmas letter. Crystal didn't know, so she asked me. I said more or less the same thing I always say: I work for a consulting firm; I'm usually at some sort of financial institution, but what I do varies. This month (and last month) it's this.

Anyway, even though I like all the people I work with, I've been kind of grumpy and haven't seen much of my family lately. But everybody's been patient with me, Mom was kind enough to put my name on the temple prayer roll, and I'm not really sure how that works, but I believe everything will be okay.

Christmas was a nice respite. The girls finally got "Rock Band 3" (among other items) for their Wii. This was Crystal's idea, and I only agreed to it because I thought the whole goofy Rock Band/Guitar Hero/I Have No Discernable Talent But Want to Pretend I'm a Rock Star fad was over and didn't even think they were still making those games. I was wrong. And the girls love it.

I got some nice stuff for Christmas, too. (Isn't that what it's all about?) I was perhaps most appreciative of Grant's gift: an updated-edition *The Book of Basketball* by Bill Simmons (our generation's heir-apparent to Tony Kornheiser's sarcastic supremacy on ESPN). The book alone would have been a nice enough gift. What made it nicer was Grant's standing in line for an hour and a half at the Borders at 18th and L several weeks ago to have it signed and inscribed to me by the author. Thanks, bro.

I hope you got everything you wanted, too. Happy New Year.

Famlet Love,
Tim et al.

