

Dear Family,

It's possible that Crystal will dispute this, but in almost 17 years of marriage (and 14+ years of fatherhood) I've held the line in selfish opposition to just two things: pets and skiing.

My position against pets suffered some erosion early last year when we obtained [two gerbils](#), but somehow I still don't envision us moving beyond small, caged rodents. Why people choose to have animals live with them remains beyond my comprehension.

It's possible that you're now feeling inclined to write back and extol the virtues of pet ownership, perhaps pointing out that I would understand how truly wonderful it is if only I were to... [something]. Before doing so, please know that I've probably heard your argument before. More than once. I respect your religion, but I find it unpersuasive.

My opposition to family ski trips is even more selfish than my opposition to pets. Even though I regularly (and loudly and perhaps at times boorishly) disparage skiing and skiers, I do this not because I believe skiing is inherently bad, but mainly just to get a rise out of my wife, who reacts to my anti-skiing invectives in much the same way as I imagine she'd react to my using racial epithets (which—she can confirm for you—I never utter in any context). Skiing slurs, however, I let fly with abandon, prompting Crystal to wonder aloud, "How can you say those kinds of things in front of your *daughters*," fearing perhaps that our children will somehow become predisposed against this particular leisure activity before dropping even the first thousand dollars on it.

My issue with skiing is simply that I'm not any good at it and derive no pleasure from it. I bear no ill will toward those who do, only toward those who persist in trying to explain to me that I would understand how wonderful it is if only I were to....

Anyway, my resistance to the family ski outing began to crumble earlier this month when Crystal hatched a plan for going that didn't involve me (other than my having to stay home with Grace—more on that later). She teamed up with some other moms from Sophie's Brownie troop (enabling them to get a group rate), threw Hannah, Lucy and Sophie into the car and made the 70-minute drive north to Liberty Mountain Resort in Pennsylvania.

Crystal dropped the girls off at three separate lessons and then took off to conquer the hill alone (for an hour or so, at least). There was some concern that Lucy, whose fear of heights kept her off the catwalks at the Air and Space Museum, wouldn't be one for chair lifts, but she rode the lift many times without incident. There remains some question as to whether Sophie actually knows how to steer or stop. Sophie's instructor didn't think she was "lift-ready" by the end of the lesson, but Crystal (pulling a page from her mother's playbook) took Sophie up anyway. Presumably she stopped at the bottom of the slope without wreaking too much damage on the way (straight) down. Everybody claims to have had a great time and to want to go back.

I obviously need to work on some better slurs.

The ski trip was last Monday (one of those teacher work days when there's no school) but Grace's time alone with me continues a trend that has been ongoing for the past several Saturdays. Most of Hannah's swim meets are on Saturday mornings, as are most of my basketball games. So Crystal's been going to Hannah's meets while Grace has been coming with me to basketball, which she seems to enjoy. She just sits there the whole game with a box of crayons and few pieces of paper and barely moves. Then we go to McDonald's afterward. It's great. She sings Taylor Swift songs to me in the car—the parts she can remember—over and over: *You'll be the prince and I'll be the princess; it's a love sto-o-ry, baby just say yeah* [Repeat]. It'd be enough to make me want to jam a screwdriver in my ear if she weren't so darn cute.

Oh yeah, so after an eight-year (I think) hiatus, I'm back on the ward basketball team. I joined pursuant to encouragement from the entire Young Men presidency (who all play and I'm pretty sure were just looking to make fun of me) and the new coach ([whom I baptized four months ago](#) and who may have been ordained an elder by the time you read this). Our stake league is fairly standard, I guess—rather physical and lots of jawing at the refs. There's a rule whereby if you accumulate two technical fouls at any point during the season you're out of the league until after you've had a friendly chat with your bishop. I personally haven't been hit with any T's (yet), but part of me is curious to see what would happen if I picked up a couple.

Girl Scout cookie season is upon us. Sophie's already hit up all the local family and neighbors. I haven't taken the order sheet into the office because 1) I'm not *that guy*, and 2) even if I were *that guy*, the president of [the firm](#) has daughters the same age as mine, and every year around this time she deposits about a hundred (free) boxes in the kitchen, which we consume in about a week. I've surmised that this probably has a dampening effect on demand.

I appreciate everyone's concern about the project I wrote of last month. The client signed off on the final deliverable on New Year's Eve—we made the year-end deadline by a little over seven hours. The night before, while eating dinner in the car on my way home from the office, I broke what I thought at the time was a tooth but later learned was a crown. Two years ago I conducted and spoke at the funeral of the dentist who put it in, so he wasn't available. Matt: Remind me to tell you why I love my new dentist.

We survived our first significant snowfall of the season this week: Half a foot of heavy, wet snow accompanied by thunder and lightning. The storm took down lots of trees and a major electrical substation. Fortunately, our power grid here in [Pepco-land](#) (D.C. and suburban Maryland) is roughly on par with that of the Philip-pines, so it only took three days to get most homes back on line. We were among the lucky ones—out for just 15 hours and I only had to gas up our generator once. Word to the wise: If you move here, buy a generator. You'll need it. That, or have parents who never lose power and live less than ten miles away. That works, too.

Come on, Spring!

Love, Tim et al





Lucy digs the chair lift



Skiers Hannah, Sophie, Mommy and Lucy at the end of a fun day.



Hannah on the block and in the pool.



Grace's true colors

