

## Dear Family,

I'm beginning this letter at 9:49 a.m. on Sunday morning. I have no idea when I'll get a chance to finish and post it.

Ordinarily we'd be in sacrament meeting at this hour. The decision to cancel today's services in light of Hurricane Irene was made yesterday. It was a good decision. (Actually, I *always* think it's a good decision to cancel church—I'm not sure what that says about me—but this was probably a good decision by any standard.)

The eye of the storm passed about 150 miles east of us at around 3:30 this morning, which is right about when our power went out. [Pepco](#) has no idea when it'll be back, but I'm guessing Tuesday. I know precisely when we lost power because I was awake for it. I'd been awake since 1:30, unable to sleep through the howling winds that whipped the trees around and caused the house to sway (though not as much as the earthquake five days ago—more on that later). We've got our little Home Depot gasoline-powered generator working as hard as it can to supply electricity to our home's most critical appliances (kitchen fridge, basement fridge, basement freezer, one big-screen TV, converter box, [FiOS](#) box, DVD player, Wii, wireless Internet router, laptops—you know, the bare essentials). Once we get tired of roughing it here we'll head up to grandma's house. I don't know whether they ever lost power, but it hardly matters because of their super-duper natural gas generator that automatically kicks in whenever their power cuts out. Anyway, I've been calling around the ward this morning, and it doesn't appear anybody's house had a tree land on it, so that's a win.

School is supposed to start tomorrow. Whether it does likely depends on Pepco's success in getting the power restored before then. I'd give that less than a 50/50 shot, but, like everybody else who's lived here for any period of time, I'm a certified Pepco pessimist.

If school does manage to go off as scheduled, Grace will tell you she's beginning "thirst grade." She means "first grade," of course, but for some reason she pronounces most of her "f's" as "th's." We find this odd since you usually hear kids make the opposite mistake. We're not yet concerned enough about this to take her to a speech therapist, but we did ask one about it. The therapist asked whether Grace had had speech therapy previously, because apparently some children who receive therapy to correct dental fricative difficulties overcompensate and put th's on *everything*. Crystal told the therapist that Grace hadn't had any such therapy but that she did have three older sisters who are all eager to correct any errors she might make in pronunciation, grammar, sentence structure, or anything else. The going hypothesis is that all this "assistance" is tantamount to speech therapy and that she'll eventually grow out of it.

I was in RiskSpan's 5th-floor office in Tysons Corner, Va. when the 5.8-magnitude earthquake struck on Tuesday. It scared the living @#\$\$%! out of me, and I don't think I touched more than a half-dozen steps running down and out of the building. The shaking lasted long enough (had to have been more than 30 seconds, though I'm told earthquakes never actually last as

long as they seem) for my mind to arrive at several different conclusions—everything from a wind gust, to construction, to a terrorist attack—before looking out the window and seeing other office buildings shaking, too. I was scared to go back into the building, but I mustered enough courage to run back up, grab my computer, sprint down to my car in the underground garage (which also scared me), screech out of there and beat a path for home as quickly as I could. It turns out my timing was fortuitous, since apparently the whole Washington area had the same idea about 15 minutes later and I only narrowly avoided an apocalyptic Beltway jam-up. It occurred to me to inspect the temple from the Beltway as I drove by, but I still didn't notice that the tips of some of the spires had broken off. After reading about it somewhere (it might have been in the *Deseret News* of all places) I drove home along Beach Drive later in the week to get a closer look at it. Sure enough, some of the spires are less pointy than they were, though, like most religious imagery, I don't think you'd notice if you weren't looking for it. (And, as Dad pointed out in his letter, Moroni appears to be doing just fine.) For those keeping sectarian score, the National Cathedral in Northwest DC reportedly received similar damage. I'm not aware of any damage to the atheist (excuse me, I mean "humanist") Washington Ethical Society that I sometimes drive by on 16th Street, so perhaps I need to re-evaluate some things.

On the day after the earthquake, Crystal and the girls joined me at [the new American Girl store in Tysons Corner](#) (across the street from my office). The plan was to eat lunch at the bistro there, so we put our names on the wait list and were told it would be a half-hour. Seventy-five minutes later we were told it would likely be another half-hour, so we decided to go somewhere else. Crystal went to return the your-table-is-ready pager to the hostess, but I rudely snatched it out of her hand (in front of the hostess) and marched out of the store. I spent the entire lunch (at Friday's) fantasizing about various passive-aggressive things I could do with the thing: throw it in a garbage can, hide it somewhere in the store, smash it into a thousand pieces at the hostess station (though I guess that wouldn't have been passive-aggressive). At the end of lunch, Crystal convinced me to give her the pager, and I went back to work. Crystal returned to the American Girl store and calmly explained that her husband has four daughters and an office window overlooking this store; that he was once inclined to like this place because of the happiness American Girl has brought his children; but that he is now enraged and would like nothing more than to see it firebombed to ashes. (I'm actually not sure about that last part, but it was words to that effect.) So we now have six American Girl gift bags with doll t-shirts, balloons and I don't know what else, and I feel much better.

I'm sorry to realize that I'm coming to end of my space and have totally neglected to report on the biennial Willis family reunion at [Oglebay](#) in Wheeling, W. Va. We had a great time, and I especially enjoyed being with all my brothers—especially Andrew and family, now back in Switzerland for I don't know how many more years. I imagine most of the pictures that get appended to this letter will be from the reunion, so I'll cover it more there.

Happy end of summer.

Love, Tim et al





Hannah and our makeshift attempt to keep the rain off our generator: One tarp, two badminton net posts, one floor lamp, one upside-down picnic table umbrella, one dozen bungee cords, and one 20-dollar Tommy Bahama beach umbrella from Costco. (I was inspired by just having watched back-to-back MacGyver episodes.)



Grace and "Kanani" at the new "Washington, DC" American Girl store (actually in Tysons Corner, Va.)



Above: 16 grandchildren (all looking at somebody else's camera) at Oglebay  
Below: Dad and his sons at Oglebay.





At Oglebay  
(clockwise from top  
left)

—Lucy and cousin  
Afton

—Grace feeds a  
lorikeet

—Sophie rides a  
horse

