

Dear Family,

It started with these incendiary words: *"It isn't as though we all have to move to Coeur d'Alene, Idaho and build a bunker..."*

They were uttered three Sundays ago during a White Oak Ward sacrament meeting by a visiting high councilor who was speaking about self-reliance. In the brief moment it took for me to shift my glance from the speaker to Crystal, her countenance had already taken on an angry scowl and I watched as she started mumbling to people in the surrounding pews.

I was sitting in my usual place on the stand and couldn't hear her, but I knew exactly what she was saying.

In describing her hometown to the uninitiated, it seems like Crystal spends a maddening amount of time explaining what Coeur d'Alene isn't. No, it isn't overrun by neo-Nazis; No, it isn't really anything like southern Idaho (not that there's anything wrong with southern Idaho); No, not everyone there is a survivalist with an ammo bunker...

That isn't to say that Coeur d'Alene (pronounced "core-duh-LAIN" by locals and others who don't speak French) doesn't attract its share of nut jobs. Take last Sunday (June 22nd), when some 2,400 such individuals, after having paid five hundred dollars for the privilege, lined up on the shore of Lake Coeur d'Alene to participate in the city's annual Ironman Triathlon. After swimming 2.4 miles in the lake, the competitors, including Crystal's mother, Carolyn, and sister, Liz, mounted bicycles for a scenic 112-mile ride around northern Idaho, and then, presumably because there was still some day left, topped it off by running a full (26.2-mile) marathon.

Crystal, Hannah, and Lucy wore their Sunday clothes to the lake to catch the 7 A.M. start, and then joined the younger girls and me at Grandpa Kent's ward, which started at 8:30. Following the block of meetings, we had some lunch and then walked to the road behind Grandpa Kent's house to watch the cyclists ride by. After several hours of Crystal and the girls clapping and shouting encouraging words at each passing rider (which I found embarrassing enough to have to move my chair down the street so nobody would know I was with them) we returned to the house for dinner, and then joined everyone downtown in time to watch Grandma Carolyn, Aunt Liz, and several hundred others finish the marathon.

The finish-line spectacle inspired me to reflect back upon my own endurance exploits—like that time last September when I played 36 holes of golf in one day. I drove a cart, but it was still pretty tiring. And watching the bleary-eyed ironmen stagger across the finish line late Sunday night cheered on by hundreds of screaming supporters was truly extraordinary to behold—almost enough to prompt me to take up running again.

Hahahahaha. The Ironman event was a pivot-point of sorts during our family's 11-night Northwest swing that

ends today. [\(Pictures.\)](#) We arrived in Coeur d'Alene on the previous Wednesday and spent the next several days with Grandma and Grandpa Kent. As the event approached, Crystal's other siblings trickled into town. First to arrive were Aunts Liz and Carrie, who drove together from Portland. They were followed by Uncle Roland's family of five, who drove essentially nonstop from Southern Virginia, and finally by Uncle Rick's family of four, who flew up from Venice, Calif. At its peak, the group at Grandma and Grandpa Kent's house consisted of four grandparents, Rod and Carolyn's five children, their three spouses, and nine grandchildren (plus two of Grandma Kent's daughters: Darcy, who lives locally, and Tawny, who flew home for the weekend from BYU-Idaho). I still have no idea where everybody slept; I'm quite certain multiple sofas, a trailer and a motor home were involved.

On Monday the family reunion moved to Wenatchee, Wash., where Grandma Carolyn lives with her husband Pat and their seven poodles. Our time there started with two nights in a condo on Lake Chelan, where Hannah and Lucy eventually had fun once they overcame their irrational fear of swimming in natural bodies of water. It's possible that they inherited this phobia from their neurotic father, but it was Lucy (and not me) who pointed out that bull sharks, which attack humans, often make their way up rivers and estuaries into fresh water. But I didn't want to be a wuss, so I braved the shark-infested waters first and the girls followed. Happily, we all survived.

In Wenatchee, Hannah, Lucy and, to some extent, Sophie had great fun with Grandma's dogs (and frequently wondered aloud why their mean father wouldn't let them have one), with cousin Noah's Nintendo Wii (and frequently wondered aloud why their mean father wouldn't let them have one), and with Grandpa Pat's backhoe. (They didn't even bother asking if they could have one of those.) Off-site adventures included a torturous hike to Saddle Rock, Grandpa Pat taking the older grandchildren (including Hannah and Lucy) fishing near Leavenworth (they caught 17 rainbow trout and perch), Grandma Carolyn took the younger grandchildren (including Sophie and Grace) to a petting zoo, and me squeezing more golf than I ever would have thought possible on a family vacation. I was hoping to get two rounds in; played four. Can't beat that. (Well, you can, but...)

The change of routine brought on by vacation has wreaked havoc on Grace's potty training. It continues to amuse me that Grace politely says "excuse me" whenever she belches, and insists that other family members do the same, but has nothing at all to say when she poops all over the rug.

We fly home tonight, and Grandpa (Willis) will pick us up at the airport tomorrow morning. I'm just hoping to get enough sleep to be functional on Tuesday morning when I fly back up to New York City for a 9 A.M. meeting where I'll be helping to moderate a meeting of members of an industry trade group seeking to implement standards to fix the mortgage mess before the government makes it worse. Fun! Fun! Fun! Have a nice month.



First, a few photos unrelated to the letter (we didn't spend the *whole* month in the Northwest).

Below: Swim season is underway (we've missed a lot of meets)



Below: Abby's baptism. (E-mail Coco if you'd like a contraband photo of the baptism itself.)



Above: A "Smith Island Cake" (Maryland's official state dessert) proudly made by Crystal and the girls.

Coeur d'Alene/Wenatchee Reunion 2008

Click on the pictures for more from the reunion

With Grandpa Kent at Spokane Falls



Grace shreds Grandma Kent's flowers



Sophie between Uncle Roland and Grandpa Pat atop Saddle Rock

