

Dear Family:

I begin this letter sitting at the desk in my room at the Marriott Courtyard in Irvine, California. The hotel was the client's pick (they're paying, after all) but I've stayed in worse places. You don't get as many Marriott Rewards points, but I sometimes actually prefer Courtyards because of the *free* high-speed Internet connection in every room. Of course, even the nicest hotel room won't allow me to sleep any later than 4:30 A.M. when I'm on the Left Coast, so here I am typing a family letter while I wait for the rest of the time zone (other than Aunt Lou Jean) to wake up. I flew in yesterday morning on JetBlue, which I'm pretty sure operates the world's only nonstop flight between Washington, DC and Long Beach. I only include my itinerary because the flight was a life-changing event for me. It was my first ever JetBlue experience, and I have to say that I've seen the light and I now feel like I need to share the JetBlue gospel with everybody I know. Fare-wise it's comparable to Southwest Airlines, but that's where the similarities end. The seats are roomy (and assigned). There's ample legroom (even for me). The planes don't smell like b.o. And generally you just don't feel like you're riding a bus the way you do when flying Southwest. Oh, and did I mention DirecTV in every seat? I actually caught an old MacGyver episode on the way out, for crying out loud!

This is actually my second business trip to Orange County (I haven't yet heard anyone here refer to it as "the O.C.") in as many weeks. The trips have been relatively short (two days last week, three days this week), but long enough for me to miss more seminary than I'd like to. With 15 kids showing up most days, this year's class is substantially larger than last year's. Everyone speaks English, but fully two-thirds of the class comes from the Spanish-speaking Glenmont Branch, and a decision was made to appoint an "assistant teacher" from that unit. Though I initially resisted the idea (to put it mildly), I have become very grateful for this good sister who comes every morning, handles a good deal of the administrative burden (so all I have to worry about is teaching) and is available to substitute at a moment's notice. Of the remaining students, only three from my own ward attend regularly (and only two come on time). Rounding out the regulars is a girl from the College Park Ward who periodically asks me to sign a document attesting to her attendance and sobriety during class. There's a story there that I'm not sure I want to know. Wait. No, actually I'm dying to know.

Though Hannah often asks about it, she and Lucy are six years and nine years, respectively, away from starting seminary and it seems far more likely that their mother will be teaching the class at that point than that I will be. For now, Hannah's happily settling into third grade and Lucy is getting accustomed to spending six hours in kindergarten. They both like their teachers, and I think Crystal and I like them, too.

We finally got around to joining the very nearby YMCA last month and were surprised to find that neither the "Y", the "M" nor the "C" accurately describe a majority of the clientele. But they do have free

babysitting, which enables Crystal to drop off Sophie so she can swim and work out while the big kids are at school. One of the principal motivators behind our joining was an interest in getting Hannah involved with a year-round swim team (and seeing if any of the Mullinix swimming genes survived getting run through the wash with Willises and Kents). But she really wanted to play soccer, and, with piano lessons going again, we were running out of days of the week. As a result, Hannah is one of only two girls in her little YMCA soccer "league" (really more of a disorganized jumble of parents and YMCA staff, none of whom appear to know much of anything about soccer) but Hannah just loves it. She breaks into a certain 1978 Village People song whenever we tell her she's going to the YMCA, and we guess swimming can wait until winter.

The now-likely (and long overdue) move of the Montreal Expos to Washington, D.C. (and *not* to the sterile, boondocky Northern Virginia suburbs, which would have resulted in most Maryland and District residents actively rooting *against* the team—to be a suburban Marylander is to despise Northern Virginia; that's just the way it is) may cause me to revise the position I'm about to take. But our family's Labor Day trip to Bowie to see the Double-A Oriole-affiliate Baysox' last game of the year has caused me once again to question why I ever pay to go to Major League Baseball games (assuming you still consider the hapless Orioles a Major League team). The proximity of the minor league park allows us to leave home after the first pitch and still arrive during the third inning. Parking is free and plentiful and close. The seats are all good. And the whole thing, including tickets, rides on the merry-go-round and several trips to the concession stand comes in well south of 50 bucks. (I didn't mean for that sentence to read like a MasterCard commercial.) And the kids just love it. It's great that baseball's returning to the nation's capital. I just wonder if we'll ever feel inclined to go.

Work on the house is nearly done. I never would have thought our project would still be ongoing when Grant and Jen moved into their new house, but there we are. Their house is great and I enjoyed the excuse the move gave all of us brothers (sans Matt; why is it always sans Matt?) to get together. We look forward to many fun family gatherings on their cool elevated back porch-cum-deck thing and to keeping track of the backyard progress as Grant executes his master plan to de-forest it.

Speaking of forests (and nature and such), we all celebrated Marci's birthday (without knowing it was Marci's birthday) by joining her, Roland, Noah and Emma for a brief camping adventure on the shore of Virginia's Lake Anna. It became slightly more adventurous for us when, after arriving, we realized we had left our tent poles at home. But everything worked out somehow. The next day saw Roland place fourth in a wimpy "half-iron" triathlon (that's only a 1.2-mile swim, a 56-mile bike ride and a half marathon) while everybody else goofed off in various ways in and behind his boat around Lake Anna. Everybody should have an Uncle Roland.

That's it for us. Sorry for no picture this month. I'm away from home and don't have access to any. Try to get through this month without one.

Love,
T, C, H, L & S

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