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Dearest Children,

Robert, please be sure to send a note to your bank as soon as possible asking them to transfer some funds from savings to checking. We still haven't been able to make your mission fund contribution for November.

What a treat! We got letters from all three of you today! We gathered around the dining room table and I read all of them aloud while we enjoyed Susanna's belated birthday shortcake with raspberries and whipped cream. Yum! So Suzy is 18.

Mary, thank you for sharing everything with us in your first letter from the field. We will save all your letters for you. It helps me to know just how hard your first days in Japan have been. I couldn't keep back the tears. Knowing how hard it has been for you fills me with love for you, and it gives greater meaning and desire to my prayers for you.

I had a similar feelings last week when, in answer to my innocent question to Robert about whether he stops at stop signs on his bike, I learned that often he couldn't, because his companion wouldn't. (Although, in this case, I confess I got a bit angry.) Outwalking, out-biking, or even "ditching" one's junior companion is unfortunately all too common and is a sad fulfillment of the Prophet's words: "We have learned by sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion." (D&C 121:39).

Being a junior companion can be a great trial -- it's probably the most hopeless and humiliating position that you've been in since you were a little child. Mary, my heart was really touched by your humble feelings and your desire to learn to become like a little child in approaching this challenge. Did you need to make your way to your first area by yourself? That must have been a frightening experience.

Robert, I was touched by your sharing of your experience with listening. If you can learn that, you will someday be a good husband -- and a rare one.

Yesterday Charlotte Knight bore her testimony in fast and testimony meeting. Annie had a particularly difficult round of chemotherapy last month and had not fully recovered when she had to endure another round. So she's really been suffering, and Charlotte has been suffering with her. After one night of particularly fervent prayer, Charlotte had a dream in which she was a little child, and the Savior was holding her on his lap. I was really moved by this expression of the Savior's love for her, and she bore testimony that she knew that there was no care of hers that was too small for Him to be concerned. I know that he loves you and has perfect empathy for you in all your trials, and I pray that his Spirit will strengthen you and comfort you in all your trials. Especially at this Christmas season, when you miss your earthly family most, I pray that your Heavenly family will be very close to you, and that you will feel at one with those angels with whom you sang at Christ's birth.

No, Zina, you didn't repeat yourself in telling us more about your companion. We thought that perhaps her father was a mission president. I'm so thankful that you have such a good companion now. I hope Pres. Frogley leaves you together for the rest of your mission, and that you have a wonderful finish.

It was good to visit John and Tuly and their children. Mom paid for the whole vacation from her savings from her job, for which I am very thankful. She even had the van repaired so that we could take it. We wore those foam earplugs that you roll into a tight roll and which expand in your ear, and that made the noise bearable. It was a sorely-needed break for me. I can tell I needed it because I've had a really hard time getting back into the "grind." On Thanksgiving day I took the kids to the ocean at Laguna Beach while Mom, John, Tuly, and Susanna fixed dinner.

(Suzy made about six delicious pumpkin and apple pies, as well as mince-meat bars). It was so great to be on the beach. It was shirt-sleeve weather, and I went in wading. There was a rocky area with dozens of nifty tide pools with lots of anemones and hermit crabs. We also found a number of small "regular" crabs hiding in the recesses of cracks in the rocks. I just love the beach and the smell of the salt air. We actually started dinner before dark and had a great feast. We also got a good view of the total lunar eclipse on Friday night, with the moon turning deep red from sunlight bending through the earth's atmosphere.

We took the computer with us and had a lot of fun with fractals. The Mandelbrot set is so fascinating, with its infinitely increasing detail and amazingly complex spirals, swirls, etc, and this program enables you to vary the colors in interesting ways which appear to impart motion to the structures. I was also able to make a good bit of progress in the final checking of the names which I've been preparing for submission to the temple, with the help of Susanna, HT, and Alex, and the Huntington kids had a lot of fun with King's Quest VI. I was also able to spend some time studying nuclear reactions and gained some additional insights into possible "cold fusion" reactions. The kids went over to their meeting house to play basketball a few times (it's just two blocks away), and I joined them once, had a lot of fun, and have almost recovered. Ian is quite a good player, and Lili and Andy aren't half bad.

On the way back we stopped at the visitors's center on the grounds of the St. George temple and listened to the presentation by a sister missionary. They have a "creation room" in this new building with nifty sound effects to help you contemplate the beauty and grandeur of the creation. This temple was the first completed since the loss of the Kirtland and Nauvoo temples and was dedicated just a few months prior to the death of Brigham Young. As it was nearing completion, Brigham (who stayed in St. George during the winter in an effort to relieve his suffering from arthritis) decided that the tower was too "squatty" and should be rebuilt. But the Saints pleaded with him to let them go ahead, so he did. Not longer after his death, the tower was completely destroyed by a massive lightning strike, and they rebuilt it the way Brigham had wanted it, joking that he always seemed to get his way. It really is a beautiful building, and the town is in a beautiful setting. We stopped in Toquerville a few miles north of Saint George to show the kids the graves of their ancestors: James Jackson, Jr. and Annis Bedford, who were both born in England and swept up in the gospel net during the first mission of the Twelve to England. James Jr's father, James Jackson, Sr., is also buried there.

Toquerville was Brigham Young's "wine mission," and Grandma Langford says the saints often partook too freely of their product, and that some of our relatives who came from there became alcoholics. Let's see if I can get your descent from these people correctly: Ida Rose Langford and H. Tracy Hall, Sr.; Earnest F. Langford and Zina Charlotte Chlarson; James Harvey Langford, Jr. and Rose Ellen Jackson; James Jackson, Jr. and Annis Bedford. So James and Annis are your third great-grandparents, and 1/32 of your genetic makeup comes from each of them. Annis was the common-law child of Mary Bedford and Samuel Smith. It was Mary's father Phineus Bedford whose grave I found at the top of the walk at the entrance to the church yard at St. Mary's church, Warley/Midgley/Luddendon, Halifax, Yorkshire, England, after my mission. He was buried in the same grave as his father, John Bedford, whose name we had never known, and whose family had lived in that parish for many generations, enabling Grandma Hall to get the work for dozens more of your ancestors and their kin.

Rose Ellen Jackson, her sister Mary Lydia, and their husband James Harvey Langford, Jr. are all buried together in the American Fork cemetery, near the north-west corner. James Harvey died there during the evacuation from Salt Lake City during the Utah War, and his wives stayed on. According to family tradition, this marriage resembles, in some ways, that of Jacob to Rachel and Leah. When James Harvey asked James Jackson, Jr. for the hand of Rose Ellen in marriage, the father said that he'd have to marry the older sister, too. When they arrived at the St. George temple to be married, the sealer at the St. George then asked who was the eldest, and sealed her first, which gave her a privileged position. But James Harvey took Rose Ellen on the honeymoon. However, unlike Rachel and Leah, these sister-wives had little problem conceiving, and between them had a family about twice the size of Jacob's, without the help of concubines. Reportedly they lived in harmony under the same roof for their entire life, and their children all loved each other.

I'm so thankful that my children love each other. It's so good to have Tracy home with us and see the interest he takes in his siblings, and the fun exchanges he has with them. You can blame him partly for "Dolisha" -- he's one of