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January 29, 1996

Dear Family,

I just read the Hallmanack (bless you, Charlotte, for keeping that up), and it was so much fun, I decided to repent and write my letter now, so I'll be early, instead of late, for a change. Of course, since Fast Sunday is next week, that's not VERY early--but let us not diminish miracles when we see them.

Nancy, that description of Doug's surgery was NOT a good thing to read over lunch--not that you didn't warn me. I just thought I already knew it all. Then what really turned my stomach upside down was reading about Virginia's muddy basement. Now there's a REAL operation! (Doug, where did you go?) If you can believe, we had to clean up THREE wet basements (one of them sewage) when we first moved into this house--but they were all due to clogged pipes and plumbing that needed rerouting--we haven't (knock on wood) had any trouble since, fortunately. In Illinois, every time our power went out, so did our sump pump. When I want to indulge in a real nightmare, I just visualize that swirling muddy water (and our basement wasn't even finished). Then there is that moldy, musty smell that seems to permeate everything for eight weeks after such a mess. My heart is with you on that one. 'Hope nothing was permanently damaged. We had to replace quite a bit of our carpeting here, but our insurance, fortunately covered it and the disaster service we called in to suck up the mess.

Our renters in New Jersey said the snow piled so high in the blizzard they got, when they looked out their kitchen window, the snow on the deck reached above the second pane! The snow totally covered the mailbox, so they had to go into town to get their mail. He said it was more than he cared to deal with, so he wasn't going to even try to remove any of it. Really gives you feelings of confidence from far away. At least they paid the rent last month, though we won't know until Feb. 1 if they got together the rest of their month and a half deposit. I just finished telling our renters that here in Utah we were walking around without coats on and Utahns were actually praying in Church for snow. Then we got dumped on. Not only snow, but this icky, white, salty stuff that looks like nuclear fallout all over your car. I don't know anybody who prayed for snow. Do you?

Doug, we're glad your foot is mending and hope it and your eyesight make it all the way to where they're supposed to be. Congratulations on the little girl news! This is such a glorious surprise (for us). Nancy, you are still young and energetic. You will do just fine. The real disaster would be. . . we won't even THINK about it. I think you should name her "Sherlene." I always liked that name a lot. "Halla" sounds like something you would eat on a leaf in the middle of the jungle. Kestle sounds like Nestle with some crunch. The kids will chant, "Let's go wrestle Kestle." It also rhymes with Pestle, and EVERYBODY KNOWS WHAT THAT MEANS!! (I can just hear D.J. sounding it into his tape recorder until the poor gyzmo frazzles up and fries.) If you want to pronounce it like "Kess lee," then you should spell it that way. The real cross between Carli & Chelsey is Charlie--everybody knows that. Which takes us back to Sherlene. Now there's a name with class!

Besides, there ought to be one of us left in the world who spells her name that way. I am

definitely on my way out. On Feb. 8 I have to defend my thesis prospectus before our entire graduate seminar of 20 students, plus all three members of my thesis committee, plus the director of the program, plus our American Studies subfield coordinator. Our director is trying to make BYU the Harvard of the West and is absolutely convinced that a thesis is not a thesis unless it involves complicated statistical analysis and all this scientific gibberish. She truly worships science as THE sacred cow. I keep telling her that a cow is only good if it can give milk, and she is udderly unimpressed. So we have had this ongoing battle all year, where I devote my energy to tearing apart every book she brings up as an apt scientific model, in order to reinforce my case that a simple, descriptive, narrative piece on Helon Henry Tracy can be also of value. When I am really feeling frustrated I point out that all the social scientists (she is a political SCIENTIST) with their scientific modeling udderly failed to predict the collapse of the Soviet Union. Now if more effort had been expended to accurately describe what the Soviet Union actually WAS, maybe all those books on scientific application of political theory involving the Soviet Union ~~and~~ imperial actor might not be so obsolete. This teacher is really nuts. She agrees with everything I say, but then still insists that I, in the name of pleasing the consensus community (euphemism for "spacious building," i.e. specious institutions), must couch my thesis in theoretical formulaic expression that crashes with brilliant innovative creation through vistas of current historical paradigm modeling with operational force that will shake the current historical controversy right off its tushery. Anyway, since I have been slamming all the examples she brings up in class and, in my usual shy way, applying common sense to all the other students' scientific foolery, I hear rumblings that might indicate a movement toward a little ceremony on February 8 that some might later describe as an effectual, scientifically-engineered "lynching."

On March 14 I'm doing a 45 minute session for our BYU student ward Relief Society on family history--get this, this is for their *Homemaking Meeting*. All of them together. I am sort of insulted that they didn't ask me to demonstrate my culinary expertise, but I'll show them how to scramble ancestors like eggs and throw them around like tossed pancakes and make it as kitcheny as possible, so it will fit the current consensus paradigm about what Homemaking Meetings are supposed to be all about.

Then on March 16 I have to speak for two consecutive hour-long sessions on "Basic Research" at our regional Family History Fair (it *really* is called a *Fair*). I told them to please change the title to something more engaging like "Sleuthing on the Sly--What your Mother Never Told You." Or something. I used to think it was fun to speak at these things. Now I just get tired thinking about it. I feel a need to share whatever I've been able to learn, but my idea of life after fifty is to spend lots of time in the library and only come out once a year to see if my shadow is any bigger than it used to be (dumb question).

Ginger inspired my latest diet. Mom and I now have a bet. The first one to eat anything with sugar in it has to take the other out to lunch. So far we've both cheated at the same time, so we've just equalled each other out. I don't have a scale anymore since Laura stole mine, which is just as good because it is a discouraging thing to have around. But I think my clothes are feeling a little more loose these days. So, Mom, don't get lax. I'm stickin' it out on this thing for awhile. Next Christmas I plan to send you all a postcard of me on a beach in Bermuda (buried in sand).

My children don't like me to say ANYTHING about their social life, which takes all the

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fun out of my letters. So I won't tell you that the last time Daniel broke up with a girl, her MOTHER called me to see what we mothers could do to salvage the relationship. How's that for a new twist? I told her Daniel was a soft touch for anything that can be eaten. So they've had him to dinner a lot lately and to their family home evenings (with refreshments), and this "break up" didn't break up, after all, because it's kind of hard to break up with a girl who is bringing you steaming hot, homemade whole wheat bread, drizzled with butter and clover honey that is sweet, sweet, sweet. Oh, the honey of it all. Hmmmmmmmmm sweet. Sometimes it gets stuck to the letters he's writing Rita on her mission. But then, can't have too much sweetness in your life.

I don't know why my children don't like me to talk about their social life. Then there's this guy who rings the doorbell looking for Laura one day when I'm visiting her. Not so sweet. Guys definitely have it better at B.Y.U.--no question about it. Laura peeks out the window, sees who it is, and says to tell him she's not home. So, what's her mother doing there? Cleaning? So I quick wrap a scarf around my head, grab a broom, open the door and say, "Whadyawant kid?" Then I decide he looks like a sweet little returned missionary, so I invite him in and tell him how my daughter still has her temple recommend, her ring finger is size 4, and would he rather have her bring him a carrot cake with pineapple filling and cream cheese frosting or a Black Forest chocolate-raspberry-filled four-story type some time that same evening?

Daniel also plans to graduate this April--so three cousins in ^{*}hats should be fun to watch. He is still exploring various avenues to take after that. Laura is in the whirl of filling out applications for graduate school. What a pain. Each school wants something different, beyond the usual request for blood, hair, finger-tip, and sweat samples. The U.of U. requires a three-four page "Liberal Arts Statement." We're still trying to figure out what the liberal arts are, but we were careful to fit in ice-hockey and basket-weaving, so we didn't insult anybody. I say "we," because Laura asks us to read it and edit, and then she revises it and then we read it and edit, and then she revises it and then. . . let me tell you students out there--be sure you allow yourselves a good six months to complete the graduate school application process. It is a ROYAL PAIN. Then you have to worry about whether your people all get their letters of recommendation in on time. Let me give you a little tip. They ask for three letters of recommendation. Well, ask FOUR professors. Then when one doesn't come through for you on time, you've still got three that make it. When they get four applications on time, they just figure you have so much enthusiasm coming your way, they'd better read all four.

Dan brought home a movie the other day, "Sophie's Choice." Not choice. I guess I've lived a very sheltered life. The two movies we see a year are usually Disney, and more Bambi-types than Pocahontas types. After all, Bambi only has bloody violence killing animals, where Pocahontas doesn't always cover her navel. Anyway, there were two scenes in "Sophies" that were more than slightly suggestive, and since I'm not used to that kind of thing in my movies, the two scenes revolved in my mind about a hundred times the next day. If the next generation is seeing that kind of stuff two times a week, it's no wonder there are so many problems. Anyway, Dan and I are swearing off movies. Except for the ones Liz recommends--Marty, do we dare? It's hard to even bring home a PG, anymore. Dan and I decided we're going back to reading books in bed on a Friday night--our idea of a great date. Let's see. . . there's Lady Chatterly's Lover . . .

Well, we look forward to your next letters. I promise NOT to write once a month.

Love,
Sherlene

* and roles of . . . an "apostate priesthood," to quote Hugh's cues.

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Wood Clan, 4510 N. 35th St., Arlington, Va. 22207 (703) 243-3690
February 11, 1996

Dear Family,

I am going to try to do better at letter writing this year. I sorted through my missionary letters around Christmas time. It is astounding how many things you forget about. I was surprised that I forgot how many letters I got from my siblings while I was on my mission. There are so many important things that happen to you as a child and young adult that are easily forgotten. I look forward to having my memories all restored to me someday. We have a young friend who is going to the University of Virginia law school. She says she feels that her memory banks are all used up. She says she's had to memorize and learn so many things that she feels her brain has to dump things from the past to make room for more to go into her memory bank. I like the sound of that. I don't remember names and things because I have just jammed so much knowledge into my head that I've had to dump some of the past out. Yeah, right.

Warren's play was this week. He was stage manager for "Love, Death, and the Prom." He played the death part of the title, as it was his character, Jason, who committed suicide (symbolically enacted) during the course of the play. It was a collection of short sequences about life in high school. They did a considerable amount of rewriting of scenes. All in all, it was pretty good. Barry had not met his Drama teacher, but we ran into her outside the box office. She knows me as I have done some costumes for her in the past. I introduced them and she raved about what a great kid Warren is. He is a great kid. He pulled all A's and B's in all his classes again last quarter. As they are all mostly advanced placement classes, we are proud of his efforts and accomplishments. In addition, he is well liked by his peers. He's had lots of opportunities to stand up for his beliefs and standards and they seem to respect him for it. Once the kids invited him to go bowling with them on a Sunday. When he said that he didn't do bowling on Sunday, one of them said, "Can't you just sacrifice one of your brothers or something and come with us anyway?"

Barry went to the genealogy library last Saturday at the Stake Center. While he was there he got incredibly nauseated and dizzy. He ran outside as it was closer than the men's room, and as he was having difficulty breathing. One of our former ward members found him lying outside in the snow and was afraid he'd slipped and hit his head. I'm glad I wasn't the one to find him lying in his vomit in the snow. They'd have found two of us lying unconscious in the snow. He finally felt strong enough to go back to the building. Two young children passed him in the hall and the younger turned to the other and said, "Is that man a ghost?" Barry understood them better when he finally made it to the men's room and saw how white his face was. They had just glued down new carpet in the building and we can only conclude that four or five hours of inhaling those fumes made him sick. We were there for Stake

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Conference today and one week later the fumes were still evident. I think these windowless designs for Stake Centers are a big mistake. There is just no ventilation in that building. He finally felt well enough to drive home, but continued to vomit during the night. At one point he said to me, "If I had the strength I'd ask you to bring me a pen and paper so I could make out my will." He did make a big find while he was there. He found the maiden name of Margaret Montooth in a new book the library just acquired. He's been searching for it for years. I wonder if he feels it was worth it? The name is HANNON. He now has a new line to pursue. *Margaret Hannan m.d. 22 Dec 1810 William Montooth at St. Paul's Episc. Church, Baltimore.*

We have a new Stake President by the name of Kent Colton. He was our Stake's former Young Men's President. Nathan worked with him when he was on the Stake Youth Council. It will be nice for him to be set apart for his mission by someone he knows. His birthday isn't until August, but right now, that doesn't seem very far away at all.

Tomorrow my basement carpet gets relaid. It will be so nice to get things back together. I hope they can stretch it enough to get it back to the walls. I will never build my house beside a river or an ocean or a stream. We have quite enough of a stream bed in our back yard when it rains. I used to think it would be so wonderful and romantic to build a house beside a river. Not on your life! I know why I was born in this generation. I would never have made it across the plains. *I wonder if Charlotte has floated away with the rest of Oregon?!*

Roland tells me he is having a really bad day. He can't find his happy meal toy he got last week. I don't know who plans the MacDonald toys, but they are a big hit in this household. I have turned the TV off today and he is in here bugging me to set up a computer game for him to play.

I bore my testimony just last week in Church. I felt so grateful for my good kids. I am reminding myself of that this afternoon as they were so restless and wretched in Stake Conference. During the second week of January when we had that deep snowfall Barry built a sledding run from the top of the hill to the very bottom for the kids. Along the way he dropped a trail or quarters from his pocket. Christian discovered them and showed them to Rose-Ellen. She grabbed one out of his hand and as it was covered in ice, popped it into her mouth to melt the ice. I was replenishing milk at the grocery store and Barry was on the phone with a client. Fortunately, Jonathan was in the yard with them. The quarter immediately slid down her throat. She could not breathe and dropped to her hands and knees in respiratory distress. Jonathan immediately ran to her side and whacked her sharply between the shoulder blades six or seven times. It finally popped from her mouth and she was able to breathe again. When I got home, I heard all about Rose-Ellen nearly swallowing a quarter. What I didn't hear was the rescue story. Jonathan is so humble and unassuming. He never told me he'd rescued her. I heard it from Rose-Ellen several days later. I'd assumed that she'd been able

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to cough it up herself. I am so grateful that he was there to help her. My kids may squabble and fuss and compete with each other, but I need to remember that they also play nicely together, and look out for each other, and help each other also.

Sometimes I come home from Stake Conference inspired and enthusiastic and ready to go. This week I came home tired and grumpy and weary and discouraged. I think they chose all the scriptures that make me squirm to quote today. You know the ones that go, "Be not weary in well doing..." and the like. Actually, I learned a great lesson today. Whenever we have Stake Conference our Stake President invites us to get prepared by doing five sessions in the temple the week prior to conference. I have always tried to accomplish that and have usually done at least three or four and usually five sessions as requested. It's always a busy and hectic week, but at the end I always felt like I achieved a goal, and felt spiritually in tune at conference. This time I didn't even get one session done. I had good intentions, but never made the effort to get a sitter for Roland and attend the temple during the daytime hours while the kids were at school. With Warren's play this week and other commitments, my nights were full. The payoff this week has been an unusually grumpy household and the feeling that little was accomplished. If I'd gone to the temple I'd at least have a good excuse for the disarray all around me.

Roland and Christian are outside my study door playing catapult with popsicle sticks and small cars and toys. The toys are flying up and hitting my walls and ceilings. I urged them to control themselves as I didn't relish the idea of holes in my wallpaper or ceilings. Christian said, "But Mom, it's fun and kids just can't help having fun." I think that is exactly what I need in my life, a little more fun. Adults are too tense. We have too much to do and not enough time. So what if the beds don't get made and the dishes don't get done and everything in the basement is under three inches of water. I think I'll pound a HOUSE FOR SALE AS IS sign up on my front lawn. Of course then I'd have to find another house to live in and move. Wouldn't that be fun?

Thanks for the birthday cards and flowers and tapes and C.Ds, and phone calls and notes. Barry was away at a conference in Las Vegas and I was feeling quite neglected. My kids didn't seem to remember and I was just grumpy enough not to tell them. It was cold and windy and miserable. But then, the doorbell rang and there was a wonderful SPRING bouquet of flowers from Liz and my whole day turned around. I made a cake to share with the kids and Barry phoned and sang Happy Birthday to me and the afternoon mail brought such nice notes from you all. My family really comes through when I'm down in the dumps, and thank goodness for that. We really should not be weary in well doing. It makes such a difference in other people's lives when you send them little notes and express appreciation for the things they do and the talents they share. Thank you all.

January is really a long month. I'm glad February is short.

Love,
Ginger