

September 2, 1984 - White Plains, NY

Dear Family,

It was such a blessing to see all of you this past month. I am writing each of you individually, but this is a chance to thank you again. With such a big family on both sides, it is almost impossible to visit each as much as we would like and coordinate everything--especially when we decided to come on such short notice. But we felt blessed that things worked out so beautifully. We had a marvelous experience--thanks for being such a wonderful family and for your many kindnesses to us. It was good to see Dad feeling better and to see Mom get her new call as Relief Society President. That ought to keep her out of trouble for a while.

Some highlights of the trip we'll want to remember were: camping in the mountains and rafting down the Green River with Cal and Karen and their family, visiting Bryce and Zion Canyons (we could have stayed there forever if Disneyland and seeing Marty and Liz and family had not been beckoning), visiting the Provo, St. George, and Los Angeles temples and Visitor Centers, staying in Monterey Park with Dan's Aunt Grace, an 81 yr. old sage who entranced us with salty family histories and stuffed us with such unheard of home-grows as figs, avocados, and raspberries that hadn't already been picked by local yokels. We couldn't believe the palm and citrus trees), Dan's almost drowning when caught by a rip-tide on Santa Monica beach, Dan's heroics in driving all night across the desert, a visit to the Shakespeare stage in Cedar City (we couldn't stay for a play), but what a pleasant campus and community), enjoying a delicious meal and fun visit with Charlotte and Bryan and kids in Delta, more good eating and visiting with David and Karen, Tracy and Betsy, bouncing on the trampoline at Doug and Nancy's (Nancy gave Laura the most gorgeous permanent she's ever had while I was at the genealogy library our last day in Utah), a special tour from Betsy of the Provo (Paxton) doll museum, including her own family dolls and many treasures, a visit by Sherlene with Carol Rasmus, asst. to the Y. Ws. about a possible program for the girls and an unexpected opportunity, also, to visit on education with Henry Eyring ("Hal Jr.") at the Church Office Bldg., a tour of the new Art and History museum and personal drive and demonstration there by Carma Anderson, who was preparing the final touches on costumes and goods being shipped out that day to the Whitney Store dedication in Kirtland, films and tours there, and a day and a half at the genealogy library (I needed at least a month!). We also visited each of Dan's brothers and sisters (except Ralph who disappeared--he has joined a "born-again Christian" group and sends us letters trying to convert us--but I think he fears a scripture chase with Dan) and went to see "Fiddler on the Roof" at Sundance with Mom B., but got whipped out by a sudden lightning-rain storm--what a drenching! In fact, we saw a lot of rain in Utah--but still enough sunshine and blue skies (not to mention the celestial cloud variations) to make the West a haunting temptation.

Uncle Wendell and Aunt Merrill also welcomed us into their home and shared some of their mission experiences and some incredible computer programs John and Uncle Wendell have created for the teaching of languages. I wish I had been able to learn with those--and fully intend to buy them for our home use when I get some money. They, too, are such special examples of love and gospel living. We had a very moving experience, too, when we went to visit the chapel where Mom and Dad B. do so much visiting and teaching and serving to the mentally ill at the Provo hospital. We could only stay for a part of the service, but I have never been more moved by any testimony I have ever heard than by one a little old sister gave there. She spoke haltingly and obviously had emotional problems--but she stood up and bore testimony, saying "I was very sad and discouraged, and I went into the women's room to cry. Then I felt a hand rest ever so gently on my shoulder. And the Lord said, "I am always with you, Sister _____." That is all she said before she sat down; but the Spirit bore witness to me that what she said did happen. I think I went in there and viewed those people with feelings perhaps a little condescending. When I left, I felt I was often more handicapped than they. Mom and Dad B. say they are desperate for help and visits for the people there--if some of you Provo people want a very sweet and humbling experience, you might try visiting there. They would love you--and you would be very enriched, too. Maybe you already have. I certainly knew the Lord was visiting there that day. We also enjoyed a tour of Mega with David and Tracy Jr. took all the kids on a mountain hike that featured some thoroughly-chilled creeks and wise-crackers. And the kids enjoyed those great waterslides a couple of times with Cal and Karen and their Dad.

We also had a picnic in the park with all the local Bartholomews and feasted on Mom and Dad's very own cantaloupes a Sunday evening with the Halls available that night (David and Tracy families)--yum! We also saw a lot of Schenectady people at the Hopper 50th wedding anniversary when Mom and Dad took us up Springville canyon to attend.

It was all very rejuvenating. But I think what I enjoyed most were the few hours we had to bum around home and see Mom and Dad in action (Mom had the whole R.S. organization and year planned within 48 hrs. after the call, I think), just laze and watch a little T.V., eat some familiar home tastes (Daniel's favorite is Mom's strawberry freezer jam), and a sacred experience for me was the Sunday morning Dad, at my request, gave me a father's blessing (Mom was there too) while Dan was on a special hike with his brother in the mountains. It was a very beautiful, comforting blessing, and I am so grateful for the example and heritage of such parents and brothers and sisters. Thanks, each of you. I'm sure I forgot some special things in this listing--that's part of the danger of starting lists. But since I did not keep a journal of our trip, I wanted to put in an overview for memory's sake.

Coming home is always a let-down. When we got off the plane, the sky was dark gray, and the air was absolutely stifling. It was so humid, I could hardly breathe. When we walked in our home, it smelled like mildew and mold. We packed in such a hurry, everything was a mess, and unpacking didn't help. The garden was overgrown with weeds, and an apparent hot spell had dried up our lawn. We still had the decisions to make about where the kids would go to school, and Dan has been in a ^{awful, awful} ~~terrible~~ mood ever since he figured out the state of our vacation expenses and our sorry state of budget. I found out I was not pregnant, after all (just entering old-age, I guess), so now I don't have an excuse for gaining all that weight--diet begins! --and Dan wrapped up his project and work so nicely before he left, they didn't seem to miss him much while he was gone from AT&T--I told him he should leave next time at a peak period.

However, it rained the first two nights after we got here, and now a cool front has come in and we are back to glorious Westchester weather. The lawn is reviving, I tore into the cleaning, and our home smells fresh now and like banana bread and homemade chili. We made the school decisions (Laura will go to Urseline--a Catholic, all-girls' school in New Rochelle--we were happy to learn she was admitted--it's a very nice, college-prep school and we think it will be a more nurturing, pleasant atmosphere for her than the public schools which get rough at times). Daniel is going to the Middle School of White Plains Public Schools. That's where he insists he wants to go and after interviewing the principal, it seems a lot of improvements have been made since so many of us pulled our kids out for private schools. They now have five tracks in math, several tracks within individual subjects, have removed the 9th grade to the high school, so only the 7th and 8th grades attend (got rid of the troublemakers!), have a strict discipline structure, and millions of dollars in federal monies to spend on computers and the like. So now we get to try and keep the PTAs of two schools happy--let's just hope D & L find the experience good.

I have decided definitely not to go back to work. If my boss gives me a part-time offer (not more than half-time), I might consider it. But when I thought we were expecting, I got so excited about finishing all these home projects before the baby came, I've decided to do them anyway for the babies I already have. And when I'm not painting, redecorating, sewing, refinishing, gardening, and furnishing, I'll do genealogy. We'll eat a lot of beans--but life will be glorious.

I think the final boost to my optimism hit when I was sweeping off the patio and discovered that our night-blooming cereus has a bud beginning to form--after I chopped it down thoroughly for my Relief Society lesson! I hope I don't sleep through it, as we did when Mom and Dad Hall's bloomed (5 bloomed at one time--while we slept!).

Thanks, again, for a special time in Utah and California. (We hope and pray Barry is feeling better now and making good progress with his mouth-repair and that all is healthy and well for Virginia. Congrats, Virginia, on your 1st place rolls. We've enjoyed them on several of our trips to the Woods' and agree they're worth a blue ribbon.

We love you all and thanks, again.

Sherlene and family.

* Dan's interpretation