

May 30, 1984

Dear Family,

Greetings from Ducksville, NY where it has rained for days and days, and we are indeed threatening to sink into the ocean and not from earthquakes, either (Liz, that was so SCARY!) We have been thinking of you out on the farm and hoping the sand deposits from the flooding turn out to be a blessing and Dad and Mom don't kill themselves sandbagging. It is WET here. Half our garden is under water. Fortunately, it's the part that isn't planted yet.

David, thanks for the figures and forecasts. As the oldest child in the family, I have always felt a great responsibility to set a good example for you youngsters. I have thought long and deeply about the possibility of our getting some money soon and am happy to report that I have decided how you all ought to spend it. THOU SHALT NOT INVEST IT WHERE MOTHS DO TH CORRUPT! By the way, we don't have moths at our house. I'll be happy to take care of it for you all.

After you all have paid your tithes and offerings and complied with Uncle Sam, then we should do something DRAMATIC and DIFFERENT with all that cash. We should band together, pool our resources, and go some exotic place and form a new colony, bringing along a few interesting professors to tutor us and a few interesting families to marry our children. We should probably go out in the middle of the desert some place where our offspring will be spared such monstrous influences as rock music (now I know what really drove Lehi and Sarah into the wilderness). Then while the rest of you are putting up tents, I will sneak back to recover the plates (my Olympia Gold Lenox, of course). While there, I might stay twenty or thirty years and make sure your treasures that were left behind don't get stolen by wicked, mean laymen.

Dan and I have definitely decided (now I'm serious) that we're going to try hard to put off the corrupt and carnal man and preserve our humility and simplicity and not spend the money on anything worldly. Here's the chance to show where our heart really has been all this time. It's easy to say you would give to the poor when you don't have anything to give. That's why we've decided to spend what's left on the things that will have lasting value. For example, Dan has decided the first thing he's going to buy is a bright red sports car. I am going to get one of those new unsuits and get a tan in the Bahamas. Daniel and Laura say they are going to the dogs' kennel and bringing home a monster now that we can afford to feed it (sigh--the joys of poverty). Laura says she can't wait to get one of those cabbage-patch worms. Then when we're through spending all your money, we'll come visit you all in the desert to make sure you haven't invented your own hard rock(s) (I am so clever today). Ah, the joys of filthy lucre. For a while there, I actually did resist the inclination to spend my money before it arrived. Then it dawned on me I was missing one of the great pleasures in life. Even if the money doesn't come through and the company that buys MEGA turns out to be bankrupt--this is probably the one chance to daydream about a REAL possibility! Ah, the joys of spending the same money a thousand ways! The only problem is, Virginia was right. There isn't going to be enough of it for me to give it all away to charity and still treat myself...er...charitably. Ahem.

Continued, of course!

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Of course you all knows exactly what is really going to happen! Get ready for this one. I have this private theory that the Lord is arranging for younger and younger couples to go on missions. The only way He can finance this is for them to get rich younger and younger. The Church has these inspired computers in Salt Lake that automatically red flag anyone who pays over a certain number of dollars in tithing in a year. Suddenly somebody gets called on a mission. I can just see it now. YOU THINK I'M KIDDING????!!!!????@!!!!

I can just see Liz and Marty in Italy, Barry and Virginia in France, Brian and Charlotte in a Spanish-speaking country like Manhattan, Doug and Nancy in some very exotic place where Doug can take his jeep--like Southern Utah, David and Karen in that English-speaking Babylon (San Diego), and Tracy and Betsy in an even more dangerous place (Provo). As for Dan and me, we haven't decided which beach in Bermuda needs us most. Sigh.

Well, the best news we have is that I quit work. I am going to learn how to mash beans many different ways this summer, and the kids might not go to Hackley next year--which is sad because they love it--but I decided my kids needed a mother this summer and probably next fall, too. A better mother than I've been while I'm working. But after one week at home, I might change my mind.

I worked very hard at my job as secretary to the president of ROBERT S. FIRST, INC., a management consulting firm in the health-care field. They do market research studies, hold international conferences, and give advice about acquisitions and arrange joint-venture enterprises. Bob First is 62 years old, a Quaker convert, a peace-nik (abroad--there is constant war in his office and in his own family) and an often-tempestuous, negative, critical, hyperactive type. He went through a dozen secretaries in five years and went 9 months without a secretary before I came in last November. But I learned to like a lot of things about the man and felt like a real diplomat and rose to the challenge of winning his respect. I think he liked me. I had to force the issue, but he agreed after six months to give me a 20% raise until he got a new secretary and a 50% raise as his new office manager. It was going to be a 3-prong job where I spent 1/3 of my time as office mgr., 1/3 on PR, and 1/3 on sales. But working for him is a very stress-filled experience. The turnover of his staff is awful. I spent half my life trying to talk people out of quitting. The other half I spent evenings talking myself into going back. My one salvation was that he was gone half the time to his Brussels and Tokyo offices. But the office equipment was fabulous, the environment fabulous (it's in one of those sculpture-and-flowered-office parks only 1.6 miles from home--I often walked to work) and the decor lovely (since he let me be in charge of redecorating the whole thing--let me have color selection and everything). But the extra hours and stress got to me and after six months, I got very sick a couple of weeks ago. I felt totally exhausted and wracked. The day I hit the bed our tapes of April General Conference came. After two days of listening to the prophets tell mothers to go home to their children, I quit rationalizing that they needed private school more than me. Now I had just better be a good mother to make the sacrifice worth it.

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When I told Bob (First) I was staying home with my kids this summer, he offered to hire me half-days--but we both decided against that plan at the same time. As it now stands, he has offered me a job in the fall to come back as his office manager at \$30,000 with another \$10,000 raise within a year if I do a good job of handling a three-man job. I guess I could become a real career woman.

But, I've decided it is against my basic nature, and I think that of most women, to really enjoy the outside world of work. Maybe part of it is that I trained myself to be a high school English teacher and I'm not that fond of the type of work I've been doing. But it hasn't been that distasteful--Bob always gave me lots of variety in the kinds of assignments he gave me. It's just that it's such a competitive environment. Bob seems to deliberately play his staff members against each other. He is such an aggressive person--I guess it takes those with true grit to stick with it. And all that grit got kind of grating, if you know what I mean. I had to learn to stand firm or get run over. There were enough intrigues going on behind the scenes to provide meat for some very fleshy novels. I worked very hard and prayed constantly; I am very grateful for the Lord's help in helping me survive some very difficult situations. I did feel His influence in helping me know what to say and how to handle various situations; and I know I was often prompted to anticipate situations and problems and know how to react to them when they came up. Even though the staff is a pretty tough bunch at times, I did learn to appreciate and respect each of them. There are a couple of them who have treated me with some degree of hostility, and it has been hard not to be able to win their approval. I've decided that's one thing we just have to be prepared to accept as Mormons. A person living a different standard is going to engender a certain degree of resentment--just because simply being there is a constant reminder to others that the whole world doesn't live like they do. Yet, interestingly, when these same persons had a personal crisis, I was the one they leaned on--until it was over--then back to the old stuff. But I think, in general, we developed good teamwork. I'm going to miss the interaction with adults and the challenges I had. I think they'll miss me, too. I got a kick out of one staff member's reaction to my quitting--and she's one who has been a thorn in my side: "What's going to happen to the atmosphere around here? When you came, Bob quit swearing and pounding on tables!" (He did?)

Last night I got a call from brother Doug Jackson, pres. of a small firm that sells security systems. He's looking for an office manager now--but agreed that I had made the right decision to stay home with the kids this summer and said he'd call me again in the fall, if he still has a position--so that's a possibility. He has three other top Mormons working for him--four with Penny Kramer who came to my Gospel Essentials class and was baptized two weeks ago. Another member of his staff asked

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We've had baptisms almost every week for months, now. We've had some wonderful experiences teaching them, and most of them have attended my Sunday School class, so it has been a real joy to see their growth as they learned more and more about the gospel.

Daniel and Laura have grown and grown and grown (groan!). This is something more than the usual adolescent pattern. If you see both of them in a lineup with the others their age to sing or participate in Church or at school, ours are almost a head taller than the rest. Both will soon be taller than I. It is incredible! So is our food and clothing bill! Daniel's voice cracks less and is almost consistently LOW! He is getting peach fuzz and broad shoulders and even admitted the other day to Laura that he LIKES girls (perish!) The bishop invited their group at Church to attend the dance this Super Saturday, and he has been practicing the moonwalk all week and claims he knows how to dance and is making bets with Laura about which girls he'll dance with. I'm too young for this! And at age 13!

Laura is similarly moon-walk-struck. She moons around all day long. She knows the words, with Daniel, to the top 1,000. She wears my blouses and sweaters and stretches them out in front! I have to pay her NOT to go to the school dances. She wants to buy her clothes at Bloomingdale's (like ALL the other girls--I'm such a MEAN mother--I don't do it!), and she won't let me in my own bathroom because she likes that mirror better and she is fitting her hair into a ponytail. She's only 11 years old! Now I know why I only got two. That's all my nerves could take.

They are wonderful kids, though. They drive me absolutely nuts at times, but I wouldn't trade them for any other two kids on earth.

Daniel went on a canoe-trip with the Scouts down the Delaware River this past week and had one big splash of a good time. Laura is also in G. Scouts and sold Girl Scout cookies to the whole neighborhood and zapped both parents without the other's knowing it. Daniel is pres. of his Deacon's quorum and takes a genuine, caring interest in the other boys--especially the ones who are faltering a little--he is fabulous--I'm so proud of him. Laura is just as sweet with her friends. She brings more friends to Church activities than any other kid, and her teacher says she appreciates her preparation and participation in class so much. She said she is amazed at the depth and insight in Laura's class comments. Both kids never lack for friends wanting them to come over or to visit here. I thought now that finals were over, I'd get the family away for a holiday on Memorial Day for a change, and instead I ended up feeding a mob at home (Dan also invited over the missionaries and would have had the whole neighborhood if I'd let him).

Laura gave up piano and has taken up flute. Daniel still pitter-patter at piano--I don't know how his wonderful teacher holds in there--but she never gives up. She says he has incredible natural talent and one of these days, he'll take hold. That's FAITH!

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Hackley School in Tarrytown, NY has been terrific for the kids. They have had to really apply themselves. The competition has been keen, both academically and in sports. The teachers are very exacting and dedicated, and the discipline, old-fashioned and dependable: no homework, no participation in basketball game. Daniel has been doing a lot of homework this year.

It has been hard on them, though, as they've worked harder than ever before to get lower grades. Laura had straight A's her last term at our local public school, and at first she worked her head off to get C's. But she's worked her way up and probably will end with a B average--which is outstanding for a first year at Hackley. Daniel is barely hanging in there. Latin and Science have about done him in. If the school keeps him another year, it will probably be because he is threatening to become the tallest member of the basketball team. He has managed to maintain average grades in math (he laughs at his teacher's corny jokes). But he has my heart because he's good in English and great in History. His History teacher says he absolutely flourishes in History, has the most beautiful handwriting of any kid he's seen at that age, is a potential team star (this teacher is also basketball coach) and is one of the nicest kids at the school. Hopefully history will reign when the admissions office makes its decision next fall (if we have figured out a way to pay next round--we will still be paying off last year through July).

One thing I have done which definitely brought up the quiz and test grades is pay them. It goes against my idealistic grain; but when idealism fails, materialism--er--realism moves in. And to think I was one of those starry-eyed believers that my kids would grow up thirsting for knowledge and glorifying intelligence. Life is hard. The fact is, \$5 for an A and \$3 for a B is more motivating than anything else I've found. Grades this last term were budget-breaking.

Dan finished his coursework and finals and probably got straight A's again. He has enjoyed basketball with the Church team and is still serving as Seventies' Group Pres. He has been very busy correlating missionary activity in the ward and doing his favorite thing--filling up the baptismal font (and some of them were c-o-l-d!) I'm still a stake missionary. This has been a year with consistent baptisms--about one a week and sometimes more. We do love the Church and the joys in teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ to others. Unfortunately, we also love the devil(s) too much of the time. This has, to put things mildly, been a high-stress year at our home. Sometimes I get very discouraged when I experience the contrast between the gospel we're trying to teach and the one we manage to live in our own home. It is a constant struggle and a real war, at times. Please pray for us. We pray for you. I get so disgusted that at age 41, I'm still struggling with some of the same old problems and sins and having to relearn the same old lessons. Anyway, I do know the concentration cannot be on the sorrows. Stay positive and all that. The key (if I can just remember to turn it) is to forget the discouragement and have hope that the Lord needs us in spite of our problems and frustrations, to trust in His grace--knowing He truly did overcome the world and all its problems (including mine), pray for chances to serve, take them as they come, pray hard, work harder, and take comfort in the joyous experience of feeling the Lord work through you to sometimes accomplish miracles. The other trick is to try not to blame yourself when what you can do just doesn't seem to be enough. Dan says it's 11:00 p.m. Good night. I loved your letters last round. Thanks so much. I love each of y ou.

Sherlene (love from all)

P.S. Just came back from Church--the Bishop called Daniel up and gave him a "gold cup" for winning more points at yesterday's regional track meet than any other kid and also a medal for winning most points in his age group (and he entered