

Tracy and Betsy, 3 March 1990

Dear Hallmanack,

Our lives are very busy and full but I seldom feel that there's "news" as such except for the fact that I'm a really crummy typist. Which really isn't news. We enjoy the children and none of them in particular drives me crazy. In fact I would have to say that every one of them is cooperative and easily corrected. They do have their sibling rivalries and so forth, but it seems that given time and a little input from parents they work them out. The hardest thing for me is the fact that with this many "free spirits" in one house said house is difficult to keep clean, especially when "free spirits" aforementioned need to be trained to clean it. But truly this is my problem, not theirs.

My brother Stephen is out visiting from South Dakota. We always enjoy each other a lot and last night we went out with Geoff and Bonnie and Bonnie's brother and Jason (I should add that "we" means Susanna and I) and wound up at Geoff's playing games and stuff. We were having such a good time that we didn't get home till three in the morning, but guess what! Nobody woke me up this morning! For the first in almost twenty years nobody needs me on Saturday morning, and I can sleep in if I need to on almost any morning. This is quite a transition for me, and one I haven't quite adjusted to it yet. But I don't plan to take on any new major life task just yet. For one thing, I am needed around here still, just on a somewhat less predictable basis. For another thing, Tracy and David are under SO MUCH PRESSURE right now that I need to keep up my energy level so that somebody around can keep things reasonably steady.

I think you all know that Zina is at BYU this semester. Mary is in her last year of high school and doing well. She is pretty concerned about deciding what to do next year. She has gotten raves for the drama roles she's done this fall and winter, and now the high school is working on The Merchant of Venice. Judy Skousen, another home schooler in our neighborhood, has been teaching math to Alex, Lili, Anthony, and Spencer (for a modest fee), and that has been working out very well. I do feel that children benefit from learning from and being with non-parental adults, but those long hours in school are just incredibly counterproductive, in my opinion, and hiring Judy has been the perfect alternative. Susanna has been teaching herself to decorate cakes lately (everybody benefits from her practise!), and writes very funny plays and stories. Robert attends school part-time and he and Alex spend nearly all their free time producing movies and animated cartoons with the video camera. This is an enterprise which involves many skills and which stretches their abilities in ways that I think are very useful. Sometimes they involve most of the neighborhood children. Alex' and Robert's major collaborator in this is David Skousen (Judy's boy), who is old enough that he has his driver's license and can therefore drive to the grocery store for such things as dry ice, needed yesterday for some special effect. We have the video camera, and Skousen's have a synthesizer and some other useful audio equipment, so it works out great. Robert and David have been best friends for several years.

Naturally we are all very preoccupied with Tracy's mission and we have had wonderful letters from him. He sent us home a seashell recently, and sent a note with it which said, "If you hold this up to your nose, you can smell the sea...." We feel that so far he is doing just exactly what he should, and we are very grateful. I'm going to transcribe parts of his letters on the page(s) that follow(s), but starting here.

From a letter dated 22January:

A week or two ago we traded areas with Sisters Gianni and Becker, and we now work Delmas 2-8, right down near the ville [the neighborhood where the Mission Home is] We usually wind up going to the Ville most P-days, to cash checks, buy things, etc. Street after street of merchants, and people in huge crowds all around. Today we went into the Marché au Fer (Iron Market) [a huge indoor marketplace in an old building made of iron].

The two people who were going to get baptized on the 13th both had vacations scheduled for then. We'll have to reschedule. Our new area has a lot of really good investigators. [They've since been transferred again] Funnily enough, two of the people we teach who are most receptive are already preachers in another religion.

....There are animals all over around here. Chickens goats, pigs, cattle, turkeys, dogs, cats, pigeons, lizards, spiders, cockroaches, ants, etc.... [the baby goats] are

smaller than poodles, and cuter, too....

...I was made the [branch] choir director...this month. I ought to be thrilled, but it's a lot of work and I seldom know how to go about it. Elder Egan helps out a lot -- he's a concert-quality pianist and the branch organist (organ meaning ... an electric portable). We sang an arrangement of "Jesus Once of Humble Birth" (in French) for the [district] conference.... It went fairly well, considering....

We had an incredible first discussion last Thursday evening, after choir and English class. Emmanuel Lainé, one of the pastors I mentioned earlier. We had a really good talk with him a little over a week ago, but weren't able to get into the discussions, and he had to spend the week in the small town right near the Dominican border where he's a pastor for about 400 people. The guy has such a desire to know the truth we wanted to teach them the first four discussions then and there, and we kept getting ahead of ourselves. He approached us on the street when we were learning our new area from the sisters. He wanted to adopt our doctrine and organisation in his ministry.

....Every other woman walking down the street is balancing something on her head -- just like in Africa. The men, too -- everybody. It's a basic, necessary skill: how else can you carry eight full-size chairs down the street?

There are shoe-shine men all over the place. The price recently went up from 10¢ to 15¢, but we usually pay a gourd [20¢] anyway.... A couple of weeks ago Elder Nebeker gave a shoe-shine man a shine out of his own box, and then payed him for it. (It was my idea, but I chickened out. My Creole-explaining skills aren't quite up to that yet.) It was quite a spectacle -- we had a whole huge crowd gather around us. But then, what's new about that?

I love every letter I get.... Remind everyone that I'm still alive -- and well, in fact -- out here in the fourth world.... I love you all. (Elder) Tracy Hall

We have had to talk to him on the phone, about his new glasses prescription -- quite a thrill. He told us this last time that he has had only one minor bout with diarrhea in all the time he's been there. Must have a cast-iron stomach, like his Grandpa Huntington and his Uncle Stephen. A definite advantage.

This next excerpt is from a letter to Tracy's friend Steven Taylor (Jim Hoen's nephew). Steve had asked him some questions about his opinion concerning some principles of the gospel. I'm grateful Steve has been willing to share Tracy's letters with us, because he has occasion to say things to friends that he wouldn't be as likely to have occasion to say to us. So here goes. I won't use quote marks.

It seems like feelings and relationships, which are intangible, immaterial, and hard to describe, are more real than physical objects, which seem merely to be vehicles for them. And the "heaviest" things are the most "real" things, which have no physical weight. My Dad says that when he fell in love with my Mom it was like he was moved to a different planet with much higher gravity. My own "heaviest" thoughts, I find, are when I have a problem ... which I feel entirely unequipped to deal with (let alone solve) ... or when I feel like I've made a mistake of some important kind which I can never remedy It seems hard to reconcile things like that with the blanket statement "All mankind may be saved..." (Read: "Everybody can wind up truly happy"; "Every important problem has an acceptable solution.")....

I do not believe that all of our problems are our own fault. If so, that would mean that all the people who were born into this impoverished country were less worthy than me, and I've seen contrary. People in this world are free to hurt other people; to cause problems for them that aren't their own fault. And that includes parents, too. We deserve two examples of people who know how to arrange things properly, how to love sincerely, and be accepting. We deserve to have people we can trust, because there is no security in mundane (physical) things, so we need security in real things. So why do so few of us have examples like that?

When you ask if we chose our intelligences, and if we chose our personalities: personality involves many things, some of which (like what I was talking about) we didn't choose, and some of which we did. At the center of it, though, is our intelligence. It doesn't even make sense, the way I see it, to speak of choosing an intelligence, because it is us, in the most intrinsic way possible. Our intelligence

is exactly what we would have chosen if we could have chosen, because without intelligence, there is no choice. When there is something about our personality that we do not like, it was not a part of our intelligence. So here we are, with personalities we don't like, and people around us hurting us in ways we can do nothing about. And yet we have free agency. There's just one thing that can possibly make any of this make sense, and that is the atonement of Jesus Christ. And that's exactly why it was necessary. Without it, there could be no justice, nor mercy. When I think of God, I don't think of some impartial, impersonal, arbiter of right and wrong, who invents commandments on whim so he can decide whose side to be on, and who to curse. I know Him as someone who is personally concerned about helping me to be as happy as I can, and someone I can talk to who will always listen, and will understand [completely], and who will give me as much help, advice, and direction as I am willing to bear.-- which isn't very much, right now, but I'm grateful for what I get.

And I see Christ as someone who was concerned about me personally to the point of enduring all degrees of pain, together with the darkest, heaviest, and most real suffering there could be in all of everything, so that I wouldn't have to....

"Beware of apples" [advice from Steve, who is a seasoned traveler] -- Thanks. They're awfully expensive here. I've only seen them a couple of places, but I've been aware. One of the places was on the street, being sold by a woman I'd never seen before. I asked my companion to teach her the fifth discussion, because I'd never heard it. He obliged, and committed [her] to pay tithing and fast offerings once she was baptized. There are people with backbones here, too, though, and a few who mean it when they say they'll [come to] church.... [This letter wasn't dated, but was written in early February.]

Now this from a letter home dated 11 February:

I had my first baptism last night! His name is Fito Paul... [and] his sister is going to be baptized in a couple of weeks. He's already a really strong member. And there's a good chance he'll start a mission while I'm here. It looks like he's going to give us a lot of good references, too....

The latest rumor flying around the mission is that we won't be allowed to have maids enter our houses. It would be a hard adjustment, and one that would meet with a lot of opposition.... [This ruling has since been implemented Church-wide. Too bad, Daniel, eh? Tracy says he's adjusted pretty well. The maids still do their laundry, but can't come into their apartments to do such things as cooking and ironing. There is an American supermarket nearby where they can buy practically anything they want, but at very high prices.]

.... We have electricity, as does everyone, as far as I can tell, but "blakouts" are a very common occurrence -- three or so a week, lately, for various periods of time. We don't get the "tiro-piped-in" [I don't know what that means] water -- because we're too high up, or some stupid reason like that. Every week or two we have to call and pay for a water truck to fill the basin downstairs, and every morning we have to yell to the people downstairs to pump some water into the tank on the roof. When there's no electricity the tank doesn't work, but most mornings we manage to get enough water for our needs. We cook with a gas range/oven. We have a container of pressurized natural gas which gets replaced every month or two. We light the oven with matches, or, when we have forgotten to buy matches or have wasted them all flicking them at each other or lighting them en masse, we catch newspaper on fire in the toaster, light a fire with the newspaper, and light the oven with that.

No blinds on the windows. All of the windows here are horizontal strips [of glass] which [are louvered]. Any part of a house which is open to the outside is covered with a grillwork.... [sounds like Africa, doesn't it?] There's virtually no violent crime, as a result of instantly available mob justice, but apparently there are plenty of people willing to break into houses. Plenty of spiked and broken-bottle fences. Kind of like the Mosaic law.

Yesterday I splurged on a Sara Lee pound cake....

The heat really isn't all that bad here, except for the middays. The evenings and early mornings are actually cool, or have been so far. [Steve Payne, who works at Novatek and filled his mission in Haiti, says this is because it's now winter. He says in the summer it's hot like at midday all day long.]

I'm afraid I have to retire now, We're sleeping (?) on the roof tonight....
Much love....

Wednesday, Feb 21

....Last night ushered in the rainy season in grand style. About the time we started walking home from our area at the bottom of Delmas, there was a light just beginning, and it grew, and it grew, and it grew. We had only walk a short way up Delmas when we caughta [ride]...in the back of a pickup truck, but already our shoes were completely full of water that had dripped down our pants, and we started our ride up the river Delmas. You couldn't look forward for more than a few seconds at a time, because your eyes filled up with rainwater. At one point where the road goes down and up again [some] teenage boys [were] running around in water up to their knees and helping to push marooned trucks. Other than that, Elder Nebeker and I were about the only people out under it. Everyone else that wasn't in a car or a tat-tap [bus] was huddled in groups under awnings staring at the two crazy whites driving upstream who seemed to be enjoying themselves as only crazy people can.

And now back to Betsy. There's more in his letter (the one immediately preceding is his most recent one), but I need to get this down to Mom's where Zina has been waiting for me to pick her up for an hour! I've been doing this for four hours now (can you believe how slow I am?), and my shoulders and neck are aching. We hope and trust you are all basically well. We do think of all of you.

Love ~~for~~ all here, Bets

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I meant "on behalf of"