

Hi Grandma,

As much as I love talking to you on the phone, I can't show you pictures that way, so I am doing something I almost never do these days – writing a letter! It's by no means comprehensive, but a glimpse into what our family has been doing lately in Texas (and 22 new pictures).

We are all well; the girls finish school this week and both got very good grades. Hannah just finished second grade and Phoebe completed kindergarten. Both are becoming avid readers! Hannah won a prize for reading 200 books this year (a small telescope) and Phoebe played the part of an elephant in her school play. They are getting so big! Both girls are good helpers for mom, and they are each other's best friend.

The girls love to play dolls (especially with the dolls and clothes that Great Grandma gave them!) and play outside on the swingset we installed this year.



Hannah showing off a Play-doh sculpture



Phoebe in her elephant costume with her elephant puppet (a favourite toy)

Emily is currently 8 months pregnant (due July 3rd but we're confident he will be early, in Emily's family most babies come early) with our first son, to be named Adam Michael Dalton. The girls are very excited to have a baby brother and we're just about ready with everything that we will need. I have about 2 weeks vacation time saved at work plus my employer will give me a paid week off to help Emily care for the newborn, so when Adam is born I will be able to take off three weeks. I didn't get to take off more than a few days for either of the girls, so this will be nice. This is our first child living far away from both her mom and my mom, so Emily is grateful that I will be around a lot in the beginning (especially since the girls will be home from

school for the summer – she would have her hands full!). Here are some pictures of Adam and his room:



Adam's first ultrasound picture



Adam's room is white and brown, trimmed in green. Emily had vinyl letters and monkeys made to decorate the walls in the theme of one of Hannah and Phoebe's favourite books called "Ten Little Monkeys" (the monkeys get in trouble on every page for jumping on the bed, every page one of them gets hurt so on the next page there is one fewer jumping on the bed). We had to repaint the room because it was previously painted pink and purple for the girls.



As for projects, they have been plentiful! We bought a new mattress in April, this time a king-size memory foam (we previously had a traditional-style queen). The new mattress needed a new bed to go on (and nice ones are *really* expensive) so I build the above-pictured. The frame that you cannot see in the picture is simple 2x4 and 2x6, but the visible part is all black walnut hardwood. You can also get an idea of the colour of the bedroom, except that it is a little lighter in person than the picture printed. Hopefully there is a colour chip from the hardware store enclosed with this letter. I did something different with the headboard, I put a short ledge in front of it that is perfect for a book, drink or cellphone & added a hidden compartment in the middle to store tissue and allergy medicine. Very handy!

My latest project (pictured below) has been my most ambitions to date (even including the office I built in the garage two years ago). We purchased a new television (a thin flat screen, measuring 50 inches diagonally) for the livingroom to go on the wall. Now, on the other side of this wall is the master bedroom (we have a single-story house), so I decided that it would be really nice to have a TV this big for the bedroom too. We can't justify the cost of buying two televisions, so I built a cabinet in the wall that will have doors on both sides. The TV is on a lasy-susan, so it can rotate to face either room! Whichever room it is not facing, simply close the doors and it's just a cabinet. On the livingroom side, the doors are more-or-less flush with the wall, on the bedroom side it comes into the room about nine inches. The bottom isn't yet done (it needs a door) and the bedroom side also still needs doors, but it is getting close!





Our raspberry bushes, now over 6 ft tall



The first berry, delicious!

Our raspberries are coming along. We planted 3 bushes (1 red and 2 black, pictured above) last spring but didn't get any berries last year. This year I anticipate about a dozen berries (not enough for a pie!) and so far I have picked only 1, but there are about 6 that will be ready later this week. I planted a red bush with the two black bushes because I read online that having a red bush makes the black bushes grow better, something to do with pollination. I don't really understand how it works, but if I can get better black raspberries by growing a red bush too, that is fine with me. The girls prefer the red berries too, so this will hopefully keep them out of my black ones!

Our neighbours across the street had a craw-fish boil last weekend and invited the couple next door to them, the couple next door to us and our family. I had never eaten fresh craw-fish before, but I love seafood so I was excited to try them. Emily's mom and dad grew up in Louisiana, so craw-fish were not new to her but Hannah and Phoebe had never seen them before and were scared of the live craw-fish (I asked them if they would like to keep one as a pet before they were cooked). My girls are good eaters, though and it only took a little coaxing to get them to try the meat once cooked. They loved them! On the next two pages I have pictures from the party, Phoebe even posed kissing one of the (cooked) craw-fish! She is very silly!

Despite growing up eating them in the summer, Emily had never peeled her own so even though I was figuring it out as I went, it was up to me to teach the girls how. They caught on pretty quick and both ate several. We also had corn, potatoes and shrimp, as well as various snacks and desserts. It was a nice chance to get to know our neighbours better.



Hannah at her first craw-fish boil



Phoebe at her first craw-fish boil

That's pretty much what is going on these days. I'm printing this as soon as I finish writing it, hopefully it won't take too long to get it in the mail. As I complete projects, I plan to do a walk-through video of my house that I will send to Dave so you can see it. Emily is going to try to tuck some more pictures in the envelope, but if when you are reading this there are no pictures, know that there will be another envelope later with pictures.

Hopefully next time I write I'll have pictures and information about how I finished the TV cabinet, enclosed the raspberry bushes in a bird-proof enclosure (my friends that grow bushes used to lose most of their berries to the birds; since enclosing them in bird netting, they do not), rewired our house with telephone intercoms and baby cameras and of course, pictures of baby Adam!

♥ Don & Family



Our house last fall after a rain