

February 17, 2003  
Aren't holidays great!

Dear

Since I owe so many of you a response either to your Christmas letter or to my birthday note or just because for whatever reason, I decided to send another partially generic letter to cover all the bases more quickly. The days and weeks after Christmas have been even busier and fuller than the days prior to the holidays. Here's why...

Sunday morning, Jan. 5, while we were in church, we had a house fire. Our Sunday School class meets at 7:30 a.m. for breakfast and Bible study. Then we go to the 9:00 a.m. worship. While we were singing the first hymn, our son-in-law came to get us out of the service. By the time we got home the fire was out but oh the mess! The floor furnace in the dining room had overheated and burned the rug, table and all six chairs. Everything in the house, every inch of wall, cabinet, etc. was covered with black grimy smoke. The Christmas tree and some decorations had melted! I have done over 40 loads of laundry, washing every washable item with Tide, vinegar and dish detergent, whether in drawers, on beds, etc. In addition I have washed (and am still washing) every can of soup, tube of toothpaste, stapler, pencil, etc. that we have brought to our temporary home on campus, a nice two bedroom apartment usually used for special guests. I stayed here last year on my visits. All furniture, dishes, books, etc. have been "packed out" of the house and are being cleaned, deodorized, refurbished off site. They will be returned when the house is ready. It is now being scrubbed top to bottom to remove the grime and odor and will be painted with a primer/sealer plus a top coat throughout. It had all just been painted in June/July prior to my moving here. We are thankful that no one was hurt and that the damage wasn't any worse. The firemen said in 12 more minutes the entire house would have been lost. The hero is our little six year old neighbor boy who saw smoke in the kitchen window as they were leaving for church. His parents had a key and could let the firefighters in without them breaking down the door or windows. We will also need a new hardwood floor in the living and dining rooms, but we did anyway due to termites!

Through this whole experience I have been reminded of some Scriptures that have taken on special meaning, such as, Deuteronomy 33:25, "As thy days so shall thy strength be." Psalm 18:2, "The Lord is my rock and my strength." Isaiah 43:2, "When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee." Finally, in James 1:2-4, 12 which our pastor preached on the Sunday after the fire, "Whenever trouble comes your way, let it be an opportunity for joy. For when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be strong in character and ready for anything...God blesses the people who patiently endure testing. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him."

Earthly things are transient. My ultimate happiness is not in the furniture or the little decorative items lost due to the heat, rather my happiness lies in what's eternal. Knowing that God loves me and that I am His is what's important.

This week I am planting (I've never planted in February before!) pansies, impatiens, ferns, etc. This is the time out here before it gets too hot. It's a welcome relief from all the other stuff to be able to do some gardening. The hyacinths and tulips are poking their heads up, camelias are blooming, tulip trees are finished, and some shrubs have never stopped blooming all year. It's a beautiful area for garden lovers! Also on our agenda this week is a trip to Poulsbo for one day (near Seattle) where Ralph will teach Perspectives.