

July 5, 2004

Dearest Emma,

You're four months old today and we've been apart for five weeks now. I'm at a military school in Maryland, and your mommy tells me that you're grabbing your feet and trying to roll over. I miss kissing the top of your head.

You have such a happy disposition. And that you sleep all night long makes your mommy happy, too! Your blue eyes, fair skin and big smile attract attention everywhere you go. I love being your daddy. There are so many things we want for you in life. We hope you grow to be happy, smart and beautiful. But there are a few things we want *from* you in life, too.

More than anything, we want you to grow to be decent and kind. When Holocaust survivor Victor Frankl was asked if he had developed a hatred of Germans, he replied, "There are only two races in the world: the decent and the indecent." Your mom and I hold that to be a sacred truth.

You'll hear two great lies as you grow up. One is that race determines a person's worth; the other is that economics determines people's actions. These lies are weaved in popular arguments and theories, but skin color does not determine the value of a person; we're all created in God's image. Nor does a lack of money cause people to behave poorly; bad behavior results from a lack of values. There is nothing more important than our beliefs and our values. They determine our character. And character trumps interesting side-notes such as race and economics.

For now we'll play and laugh and spend lots of time together. You like to sit in your swing in our back yard, under the gazebo, watching your 21-month-old sister, Sarah, run and chase butterflies and slide down her slide. Sarah brings you toys and plays with your toes.

There are lots of butterflies in life to chase. We live in America, a wonderful place that recognizes our freedom to pursue happiness in the ways of our choosing. It's a remarkable blessing in world history, and it carries great responsibility. I hope you learn to balance the art of savoring life while understanding that choices carry trade-offs. Your mom has chosen to stay home and raise you and Sarah at the expense of pursuing a career. She says it was an easy choice.

When I get home I'll put you on my lap and read to you. Reading has become less popular these days with the advent of television, video games and the Internet. But people who cultivate a love of reading discover the immense joy of imagination and nuance. There's no place you can't go, no era you can't visit, nobody you can't meet, when you turn the pages of great books.

And the greatest books will offer wisdom of the ages. It's become trendy to reject the long-accepted idea of an external source of morality that lays claims on us. Around the time I was born, many people began putting more credence on internal moral guidance – they derive ethical instruction from their hearts. That's OK to a point, but I hope you'll realize that our hearts are often misleading and confused. Ignoring the transcendent source of morality in our Creator seems to be breathtakingly narcissistic.

Fashioning a good life takes hard work; it doesn't just happen. The key to happiness is gratitude. We hope you learn to be content with your lot, even as you pursue a better life. But I can't remember seeing a truly grateful person who was not also a happy one.

I've heard it said that the true measure of a person is not how much a person had, but how much a person gave. May we always remember to visit the sick, comfort the grieving, and help the needy.

Meanwhile, you'll learn more and more every day. You'll grow even closer to your sister and your mommy, especially since they're with you everywhere and always. Soon, when you roll over, I'll be there, too. And we'll be together. Always.

Love,
Daddy