

September 26, 2002

Dearest Lil' Pea,

That's what we call you because, unlike most expecting parents these days, we chose not to find out whether you're a boy or a girl. Tomorrow, God willing, we will call you Samuel or Sarah.

All I know about you now is that you are 7 pounds and you move around a lot, especially at night when mommy lies down. She loves it; knowing you're there – wiggling and growing. Every night I touch her tummy, feel you, and say a prayer.

Today is a glorious sunny, clear day. We live in northern Utah at Hill Air Force Base, which is nestled about 4,800 feet between the majestic Wasatch Mountains and the Great Salt Lake.

It's late September and the orange patches on the mountains mean the leaves are beginning to turn, ushering fall. And like the changing seasons, you will change our lives forever. We are excited and grateful.

I can't wait for you to see the colors of fall, the snow of winter, the renewal of spring and the sunny days of summer. Just today I was driving with the windows down and sunroof open, listening to Ella Fitzgerald, and thinking that I can't wait for you to feel the wind on your skin, blowing your hair.

And as the F-16s roar and streak across the sky on their training missions, I am reminded of mankind's breathtaking technological achievements. But their presence also illuminates the amount of evil lurking in the shadows.

History unveils a paradox: Mankind conquers science but struggle with ethics. People are getting smarter but not necessarily wiser. Of course I'm generalizing, but you'll see what I mean.

And as we receive you as God's greatest gift, we accept the monumental responsibility of raising you. Like parents before us, we worry about bringing you into a world filled with struggles and enemies.

But, thankfully, you're in America. It's a unique place, one that stands for liberty and justice. It does so by recognizing individual rights, so eloquently laid out in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. I hope that when you're older you'll appreciate these ancient parchments as magnificent and timeless anomalies in human history.

You won't care about this stuff for a long time. First, you'll just want to be fed, warm and dry. We'll do our best to keep you comfortable and happy. We'll probably drive you crazy because we'll always want to look, touch and coo at you.

Our primary role will be to teach you good values. More than anything we hope you grow into a decent and kind person. Of course we hope you are healthy, smart, good-looking, successful and happy. But most of all, we value human decency.

It won't be easy. Mixed messages – many of them awful – abound. We can't shield you from all of them. Once you reach a certain age you will assume much of the burden yourself.

Few things will be as important as the people you associate yourself with, whom you choose to admire and what you feed yourself mentally, spiritually and emotionally. My mom told me, "If you hang around a barber shop long enough, you're bound to get a haircut."

I hope you hang around nice barbershops.

In fact, I got the idea to write this letter from somebody I respect and admire: Jeff Jacoby, columnist with *The Boston Globe*. He writes one every year for his son, Caleb.

Your mom and I wonder what you look like and what kind of disposition you'll have. But, as I said, that matters less than the character you'll develop.

That will depend very much on the example your mother and I set. My commitment is to provide a safe, nurturing and happy home for you.

You don't have to give me any commitment yet – aside, maybe, from making your big debut as easy on your mom as you can.

We love you and we'll see you very soon.

Love,
Daddy