

Empty seats at family celebrations

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Dear Mom and Dad;

As Kim and Liam blew out their birthday candles recently, they marked small milestones in their lives.

They were surrounded by all who loved them ? their family.

There have been a few such celebrations in recent years, events you missed through no fault of your own.

I haven't had much time to write recently ? our three trouble-makers are a handful, and I only have two hands!

You are likely keeping an eye on us from your heavenly perch ? hopefully, it's a hilltop on a beautiful meadow, or in a comfy reclining chair on an endless beach.

In case you haven't had time to catch up, or simply weren't permitted by the Big Guy, I'll fill you in on a few things.

Lexie, our firstborn precious cargo, celebrated her 15th birthday. Dad, has it really been that long since you left?

The party in our basement was brimming with teens. All went well and by all assessments, Lexie is well liked by her peers.

That's good to hear. The teen years can be so troublesome, it's nice to know she's blessed with charm and a good heart.

Her big heart was evident during her mission trip through her high school, in which she helped less fortunate souls in the Dominican Republic. You would have been very proud of her, just as we are. Maybe you followed her on her adventure and helped keep her safe.

It would be nice to see your faces, grinning from ear to ear, at Lexie's accomplishments. I'm sure part of those smiles would be meant for me, too. There are times I'd just love to reach out and place my hand on your cheeks.

Lexie would squeeze the stuffings out of both of you if only she could.

I know it's not practical, but please blow her a kiss from the clouds, and ease her teenage burdens just a little bit, by dusting off her strong shoulders. Maybe you're both there, just beyond the scope of human vision, standing behind her, with hands firmly placed on her shoulders.

She's quite the athlete and often gets down in the dumps when she doesn't "make the team." She loves soccer and I know that with each pass, or powerful kick, she grunts, feels alive, and is supported by the "ghosts" of generations past. Maybe you have been able to see her, invisible on the sidelines. Save a cheer, and rattle the bleachers in your neck of eternity!

Academically, she's doing well and is interested in the arts at her high school. There's no telling just where she'll end up!

Liam, our clan's only boy, extinguished 12 candles recently.

While he's stubborn and argumentative, he's filled with curiosity and questions about the past, future, life, death and the infinity of the universe. He loves to have fun, stage mock battles and enjoys every experience life has to offer.

For his birthday celebration, I took him and a few of his friends out for an afternoon of paintball fun. We checked out

paintballguides.com before we left because he was thinking about getting his own afterward, they had some interesting guides on there! Wow, running around a dimly lit warehouse with 30 other kids, teens and adults were fun but tiring. Some of the other adults

took it so seriously! They were rocking up with their own guns and some of the [best paintball masks](#) available. I felt like a bit of a novice, but in the end I enjoyed it just as much as they did. It did make me curious about other gun-like sports, such as airsoft (one of the kids had told me about [Bespoke Airsoft](#) on the drive over). Still, I was dispatched by some well-placed shots in every round, but I rolled around the dirt laughing while I winced.

Boys will be boys.

When he laughs from the belly, you can't help but join in ? it's contagious. Perhaps his squeals of joy penetrate the Pearly Gates from time to time, turning heads! Feel free to tell the others it's your grandson.

He's not a big fan of hitting the books, but he's quite bright and a quick learner when something interests him. He's mastered several video games that I stumble through as he tries to guide dear old dad through wrecked buildings and alien terrain. He can spend a long time on these games, which is why it's important to look for ways to make sure he's sitting safely. Only recently gaming chairs have been adopted by the pro gaming scene. Most professional gamers use them and [Coolest Gadgets](#) says that they are one of the best investments a gamer can make. These help to support the child's back, improving their posture along the way.

He's a loving boy child. Dad, you never got a chance to see your only grandson. And it saddens me that you never got to know him. He's missed that connection and if there's any celestial way possible, send him a sign or drop by for a visit, only to look into his eyes for a few moments and see what's in his heart.

Kyleigh Q, our youngest prodigy, is a spunky child, with more moxie than the other two combined! We only wish she'd use her powers for good, not planting her feet firmly on the ground and placing her hands on her hips, taunting us to try to sway her.

As the third born, she's likely heaping on the assertiveness to assume her rightful place in the family hierarchy and be noticed. Oh, she's noticed all right!

She's also a fast learner and has a passion for art and music. She wants to be a "farmer," but wants her husband to do all the work! She loves horses and perhaps we'll let her try riding this summer.

Mom, she felt your departure profoundly for such a small child. She thinks of you often and sheds a tear now and then, recalling the times you spent together.

She also has an intense curiosity and is willing to try anything.

Most of my kids enjoy roller coasters ?one contraption that I avoid like the plague. They are adventurous thrill-seekers to be sure and we're trying to feed their zest for life.

Mom and Dad, I hope your time on earth was well spent, and you're pleased with how some things have turned out.

While my life isn't as charmed as I would have hoped, I am trying and remain somewhat optimistic. Kim is our rock and I think we both have to let more roll off of our shoulders.

I have no shortage of intestinal fortitude, but outside stresses and frustrations take their toll from time to time.

Mom and Dad, thanks for laying the groundwork for all that has unfolded around me. I may not be the Michaelangelo of child-rearing or fatherhood, but perhaps my form of abstract art is pleasing to the eye.

Thinking of you.

Your Son.