

August 17, 1997  
(Daddy's birthday)

To my precious Katie,

Words cannot begin to express the love that your mommy and daddy have for you. As we await your arrival with much excitement, anxiety, and fear, we can only hope and pray that God will sustain us through the difficult days that lie ahead.

We hope that we have not been keeping you awake, but we have not been sleeping well because we are struggling with questions that no one should ever have to face:

Will we get to hold you after you are born or will the doctors and nurses have to rush you to the neonatal intensive care unit right away?

Will the surgeons be able to perform your first surgery successfully and how will you recover?

If something does go terribly wrong and you do not recover from the surgery, what kind of funeral will we give you and where will we bury your precious little body?

Will we get to see you and Benjamin playing together?

Will we ever get to see you take your first steps or hear you speak your first words?

Will we get to see you go to your first day of school, sing in your first choir, play in your first piano recital, or perform at your first dance rehearsal?

Will we get to hear you receive Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior?

Will we get to see you play any sports, go on your first date, or work at your first job?

Will we get to see you go to your senior Prom or walk the stage at graduation?

Will I get to walk you down the aisle to marry the only man in the world that will treat you better than I can?

Will we get to hold your children?

Please bear with us. This is all a bit much for us to deal with right now.

We promise to love you with all that we are, for as long as God chooses to give you to us. The only thing that is keeping us sane is the realization that God has this all under control. You have always been and always will be in His hands. God has promised that He will get each one of us through this heart struggle no matter what happens or how long it takes.

Tossing and turning (one year older),  
Daddy

September 7, 1997

My dearest Katie,

We have spent as much of the last three days as we could with you and have tried to feed you and hold you as much as possible. We are starting to get used to all of the different noises and activities of the PICU, which is sort of scary in a way. There

have been a lot of family and friends coming to see you. You have been held and fed by so many people that I wonder if you know which ones are Mommy and Daddy sometimes. What a blessing it is to have all of these people to support us. They are such an encouragement.

Mommy's doctors released her from the hospital today, so we spent much of the day taking all of our stuff back to our little two-bedroom duplex. It was so hard going home without you. It is just not supposed to be this way. Mommies and daddies are supposed to take their newborn babies home with them from the hospital. But, sometimes we do not get to live the fairy tales of which dreams are made.

The surgeons wanted to schedule your surgery for September 9, which is also Mommy's birthday. We just could not bear the thought of something terrible happening on Mommy's birthday, so we asked the surgeons if they thought that postponing it a day would be acceptable. They thought you were healthy enough to wait one day, so we set the surgery for September 10.

We continue to love you more as every moment passes by. We hope and pray that the next few days and weeks go as well as possible and that we get to bring you home very soon.

Loving you more,  
Daddy

December 31, 1997  
(Benjamin's funeral)

Today was a day that no one could have predicted.

Mommy and I attended your playmate Benjamin's funeral. He was just a couple of weeks older than you. He died so unexpectedly of something called Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. Mommy got a call from Cynthia, Benjamin's mommy, a couple of days ago and she said that Benjamin had died. We were all completely stunned. Other than a cold, Benjamin was in perfect health, or so everyone thought. And now he is gone.

I was actually a pallbearer, which means that I carried his casket. I will never know how I was able to do that without completely breaking down into a sobbing mess. Mommy and I hurt so much for Corby and Cynthia. There are no words that we can say to make them feel better. There is absolutely nothing we can do, except to be the best friends to them we know how.

All of this makes Mommy and me want to hold you so much more closely and never let you out of our sight. With everything that you have been through, you are in pretty good health, too. You just never know what life has in store for anyone.

Please forgive us if we hold you a little more than you would like.

We love you so much,  
Daddy

March 4, 1998

To my beautiful, six-month-old baby Katie,

It is so hard to believe that you are six months old. Mommy and I are so glad that you have been with us for this long and that you are doing so well.

About a month after we got home from the hospital, you had to have a relatively minor surgery to revise the venous pressure (VP) shunt in your head, because it clogged up. Thankfully the surgery went well, but when it comes to a "heart baby" like you, nothing is minor about any surgery.

We have gotten used to feeding you every two hours and all of the medicines that we have to give you. The doctors have scheduled your next surgery, called the Hemi-Fontan or bi-directional Glenn, for April 1, just a little less than a month away. We cannot believe that you are about to go through another open-heart surgery. In fact, we try not to think about it at all right now. We just try to enjoy every moment with you and look forward to the day when all of these surgeries are over. After all, we still have at least one more surgery to schedule when you are about one and a half years old to three years old.

We have just moved from the duplex into our first house. Now you have a decent-sized yard to play in and we do not have any annoying neighbors playing their music too loudly and waking us up at all hours of the night. It is a little house, but it is ours.

I had a big argument with the medical insurance company last week. They tried to force us to have your next surgery done by "in network" doctors at an "in network" hospital. I told them that there was no way that anyone but Dr. Calhoon was going to do any open-heart surgery on you. I explained to them that no other doctor knew as much about your heart condition, kidney condition, and how your VP shunt might be affected during and after the surgery. I told them that if they made us have the surgery "in network" that I would sue their pants off if one hair on your head was out of place because of that decision. I guess I made the point, because we are going to San Antonio. I get a little mad at people who think that they know what is better for you than Mommy and I do. We will always do what we think is best for you, no matter where we have to go or what the cost.

Anxiously awaiting your next surgery,  
Daddy

September 11, 2001  
(What a horrible day)

My dearest Katie,

Just one week since my last letter to you and the entire world has changed. This morning, some very evil men that hate our country crashed three airplanes full of

people into three very important buildings, and a fourth plane that was supposed to do the same thing crashed in a field in Pennsylvania because some very brave people would not let the evil men carry out their plan. Over three thousand people died today, purely because of misguided hatred.

I am not even sure what to write to you about all of this. I am numb, angry, scared, confused, and some other emotions that do not even have names. One of my most important jobs as your Daddy is to protect our family. I will fight to the death to keep all of you safe. But, right now, I just do not know what to do. The trivial things that seemed so important yesterday are so meaningless today.

The only thing that I know to do is trust that God is going to take care of our family and our country. I pray that God will help me love Mommy, you, and Luke better than I ever have.

Even though there was so much evil being played out today, there was at least one very good thing that happened today. Baby Erin was born to Kristee and Chris. They are friends of ours and we look forward to watching this precious angel grow up like you and Luke have.

I hope and pray that by the time you are able to read this by yourself, the world is a much more peaceful place. Regardless, trust God with your entire life, my Katie. He knew you while you were in your mother's womb and He is faithful to do all that you ask and more.

Daddy

August 20, 2003

(Your first day of kindergarten)

Oh, my! Can it be that you are actually starting school today? It just does not seem possible that you are old enough to begin kindergarten. The days, weeks, and months are going by so quickly. Why, it feels like just yesterday we were celebrating your first birthday and here you are all grown up now. Okay, maybe your sappy Daddy is putting it on a little too thickly. But, it is hard to believe you are going to be six years old in a couple of weeks.

You, Mommy, Luke, your five month old perfectly healthy baby sister Emily, and I all piled into the van and took you up to school this morning. I am sure a lot of people might laugh at us for making such a big deal about it, but this is an incredibly big deal. If only they knew the incredible story of your life. Because you are so healthy, almost no one would be able to guess even half of the ordeals you have been through. Thank you, God.

Mommy and I were looking at some pictures of you we took two years ago and you still had a little bit of a baby face. That is all gone now. You are definitely growing up out of childhood and into a beautiful young lady. We are so proud of you and thankful God has given you to us for this long. We pray He continues to bless you with good health and you enjoy your kindergarten class.

Beaming with pride,  
Daddy

September 4, 2004  
(Your seventh birthday)

Happy Birthday, my precious Katie!!!

You are seven years old today. My, how time is flying by, faster and faster everyday.

We will be having your birthday party in a couple of days at Chuck E. Cheese. It is amazing how well those commercials work on kids and their parents. Nana and Papa are staying with us this weekend and we are all so glad to be celebrating another year with you. You will be getting several Barbie gifts, some other "Princess" gifts, and pajamas with a teddy bear on the front, just like you asked; everything that a young girl who does not ask for much could hope for.

You started first grade a few days ago, and, yes, all five of us took you to school for the big send off, just like we did last year. Personally, I will not mind if we do that every year until you graduate from high school, or even college. Of course, I am sure you will have something to say about that in a few years.

Almost every morning I take you to school and walk you as far as you want me to take you. Some days you want to go all the way to the end of the hall where your class is, other days you want me to take you just to the front door and let you go the rest of the way by yourself. Just so you know, I will never get tired of taking you all the way to the end of the hall.

We are all so proud of who you are and who you are becoming. You love to read and sing, and sing and read. You are doing pretty well in school, but you are having a little problem with handwriting. Considering everything you have been through, we are very thankful handwriting is the only problem you are having. Well, you do occasionally have a hard time sitting still and not talking, which is very understandable, given that you are such a "people person." You have never met a stranger, which quite frankly scares me to death sometimes.

Mommy and I are finally teaching you to ride your bike without training wheels, which is something else that scares me to death. God did not bless you with very much coordination. When you couple that with your intense desire to look at everyone and scream, "Look at me," rather than paying attention to where you are going, I am terrified there is a trip to the emergency room in the near future. If not for you, then for my aching back. Seriously, at times like this, it is so hard to let you grow up. I want so badly to protect you from even the possibility of getting hurt or scared. But, to do that would mean keeping you from experiencing the sheer joy of life itself, which would be an absolute travesty to God and the wonderful miracles He has performed for you and us.

You love life. You love people and animals, clouds, planes, dolls, dogs, cats, cartoons, coloring and, well, just about everything. You are such a loving, sweet,

tender girl, and we love you immeasurably.

Occasionally, we will have to take you to have some blood drawn or some other type of medical testing or procedure that are not going to feel very good at the time. I hope you understand it is for your best, and we would never allow anyone to hurt you unnecessarily. We will always do what we feel is best for you, whether it is medical or otherwise.

This past week we learned of a baby girl named Chloe who was born with the same heart condition that you have. We prayed so hard that God would work a miracle through her surgeon's hands to sustain her precious life. But, it was not to be. She died when she was only five days old, one day after her first open-heart surgery. Mommy and I cried when we found out. We hurt so badly for Chloe's mommy and daddy. We feel so helpless. We know God knows what is best for everyone in the long run. But, it sure does hurt right now. And, once again, we are reminded just how special you are and that God has blessed us so much more than we deserve.

We know too many precious babies have left this world way too soon: Benjamin, Dominic, Baby Bryant, Baby Hillier, Chloe, and so many others. We pray God will continually fill their parents' empty arms with His presence and His love and the hope that some day, through Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, when this life is over, they will spend eternity with their precious baby never to be separated again.

We are so thankful God is allowing us to see the answers to so many of the questions we had about your precious life not so long ago, and the answers are so wonderful. We hope and pray God gives you a very long, healthy, and joy-filled life and we get to share life with you as long as possible. We look forward to seeing the rest of the answers to your life's questions.

Blessed beyond measure and loving you more everyday,  
Daddy