

Happy Christmas from the *manic-but-merry* Minnich family! I was asked this year how we balance everything, to which I replied “Oh, there is no balance. There is only chaos.” In keeping with the felt theme of our year, I will report our family’s escapades chaotically, devoid of my usual clever headings, and you will be hard-pressed to find a unifying organizational structure in either this letter or in our lives.

### Winter

Sally started 2025 off with a bang- specifically, being shot point blank with a nerf bullet into her actual eyeball. Apparently this is a relatively common occurrence, as the emergency eye doctor was unfazed and reassured me that it was always the moms getting “nerfed in the eye.” A few steroid eyedrops later, I was in the clear and ready to see all that this year would have in store.

The winter was mostly peaceful, and Will and Ellie briefly found interest in a magic set. Neither child is quite on track to become a vocational magician- so far their routines have mostly consisted of (Will) haphazardly throwing items in a different direction to make them disappear and (Ellie) waving the wand, saying magic words, and lifting the cup to discover with great disgust that *ug!* The pom-pom ball was *still there!* The kids’ current musings about what they *will* be when they grow up include an author, artist, or video game designer for Will, and for Ellie- a violin/cello teacher, a “dancist,” a “colorist,” or an ambulance.

We somehow made it over six years into our parenthood journey before a child threw up in a car, but Ellie helped us make up for lost time by throwing up in the one and only *new* car we ever bought, at a time when it was so fresh as to be completely devoid of napkins, diaper wipes, trash bags, forgotten articles of clothing, or literally anything helpful in this situation. For a few endless minutes, Ellie screamed because she felt terrible, and Will screamed because the new car had been defiled.

### Spring

The spring brought Will’s very first wiggly tooth and the longest power outage of our lives. We were without electricity for three full days- attempting to save the freshly-bought groceries by shoving sacrificial freezer items in the fridge, only to end up with still-questionable food and an entire refrigerator filled with some sort of popsicle-thaw goo. Near the conclusion of this, when we were at a friend’s house eating dinner and doing our laundry, Will walked up to us and handed me his first baby tooth.

The Spring Music Academy solo recital included Will’s performance of Minuet II and Ellie’s debut (and possibly last) violin performance. She had been expressing to us for a couple months that she was really a cellist, and while I truly enjoyed teaching her for the year (and we worked surprisingly well as a mom/daughter pair), I found it fascinatingly difficult to prioritize her lessons amidst the chaos of our overall family life. Because external accountability is helpful, because we love being “cello parents”, and because we always hoped we could give our kids the opportunity to choose their own musical instruments, we made the official switch to cello in June.

Ellie also had her first dance recital on May 31 at an outside amphitheater. Their dance was titled “Snowflakes,” which ended up being surprisingly appropriate given the unusually cold weather that day. With an astounding amount of grit, she danced beautifully in her tutu through wet and windy 50-degree temperatures while the rest of us sat in the audience in our winter coats. It brought me to tears to look at the picture of her stunning dance pose with her beautiful straight legs, knowing that she, unlike other dancers, had endured around 100 needle pokes to get her legs to even grow straight in the first place, not to mention strong and healthy enough to dance.

## Summer

Early in the summer, I (Sally) was excited to be promoted from Principal Second violinist to Concertmaster of the Nittany Valley Symphony, following the retirement of Joanne Feldman. I also finally underwent ADHD testing and got a positive diagnosis, only to learn that all ADHD meds are counter-indicated for HCM patients. So, in absence of any new medication avenues, I'll continue as before, only now with a medical excuse when I lose my phone or show up late to something after forgetting for the thousandth occasion that time is a phenomenon that exists.

We took a family vacation to Outer Banks, NC again this summer and arrived at a charming condo right on the beach with a beautiful, clear view of the ocean as well as the double red flags warning us about dangerous currents from high winds. Still, no one needed to go beyond the break wall as our kids were happy to play at the edge of the waves and in the sand. It was a very good trip. Nothing is quite so relaxing as lying on the beach with the sound of the waves, nothing quite so perplexing as watching your children who are often "too tired" to pick up their toys engage in hard manual labor for an hour digging trenches in the sand, nothing quite so terrifying as hearing your four-year-old say, upon summiting the sand dunes a half-mile from civilization, "I have to go potty."

## Fall

Fall brought the last year of preschool for Ellie, 2<sup>nd</sup> grade for Will, and more loose teeth along with tooth fairy contemplations. Will struggled with wanting the reward from the tooth fairy but also wishing to keep one of his baby teeth for sentimental reasons. He pondered whether the tooth would depreciate in value if he didn't put it under the pillow right away, and a month later (upon deciding to keep his first upper tooth that fell out), whether the tooth fairy would understand not to take it since it was on his bookcase instead of under his pillow.

One of the things that continues to surprise is how often we have to pick locks, despite no mention of this in any preparatory parenting materials anywhere. Similarly *not-as-advertised*, we discovered that young children *can* actually operate childproof caps on medicine bottles. I feel I hit a peak parenting moment one day when I first deduced that child #2 had conquered the safety cap and helped herself to an extra melatonin gummy, convinced her to spit it into my hand, chased her down the hall and picked the lock of her bedroom door like some sort of ninja with my nondominant (free from sticky, spit-out gummy) hand at nearly the speed at which she had locked it herself. Lastly, I checked that she'd consumed a safe amount of melatonin and reminded her that medicine is not candy, all while listening to the soothing sounds of child #1 screaming from being not allowed to play with the psychedelic light-up toy minutes before bedtime.

One day, during an otherwise ordinary car drive with Ellie, she excitedly announced, "I haven't even been practicing, so I don't know how, but I REALLY can speak in language! *Neh-zidjinia statume... faa FAA fink pa snah!*" When Ellie is not speaking with great confidence in utter nonsense syllables, she actually has quite a spectacular vocabulary. She soaks in the moment, be it relishing the beauty of Christmas lights, musing over her *very-special-to-me* everythings, or climbing out of the car at the speed of a sloth; (truly, I think at times I could get the groceries, clean the house, and earn a PhD all in the amount of time this child takes to unbuckle herself and exit a vehicle). This year when we pulled out the Playmobile Nativity, Ellie gazed at baby Jesus in His manger, held delicately in her hands, and asked me, "Mommy, want to enjoy baby Jesus for a minute?"

May you be just a little like Will in his thoughtful contemplations, and just a little like Ellie, enjoying Jesus and/or whatever else happens to be in front of you this season. With love,

Sally, Mark,  
Will ♥ ELIE