

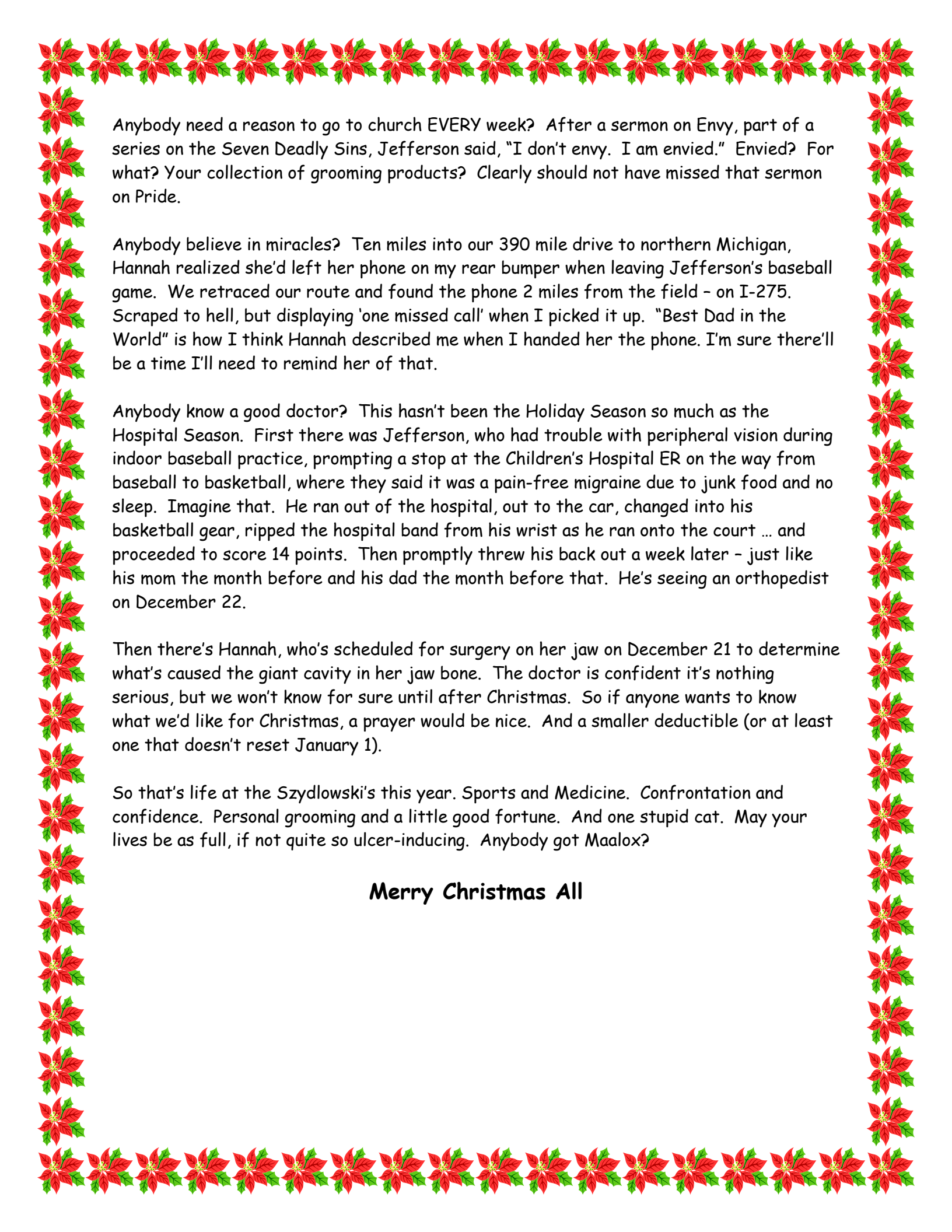
Anybody want a cat? We've got one. He's a pretty cat, though not particularly bright. Especially when it comes to "never bite the hand that feeds you" (or scratch or claw it). Which pretty much explains why the two most uttered sentences in our house are, "Wow, that's a pretty cat" and "You want him?"

Anybody need a lawyer? We've got two (if you count Chris). You may remember Hannah, our 13 year-old who long ago argued jumping and bouncing were different activities (when told to stop jumping on the bed) or who, when told she could leave her room when she agreed to obey, would only go so far as to say she "wouldn't disobey" (grrrr). She's now taken her practice public. Her latest case? A teacher so frightening that even parents speak of her in hushed tones for fear she'll overhear. A teacher who insists students remain after the bell, making them late for their next class. But not Hannah. A day after explaining to her assistant principal why she was walking the halls after class had begun, she stood up to leave when the bell rang. Her teacher asked where she thought she was going and Hannah said her next class because Mr. Rouff said she could. Eight students followed her. Next day, Mr. Rouff nervously told Hannah he was only kidding. Like I said, the woman is scary. In her own way, so is Hannah.

Anybody got nose plugs? Please, I could use them. I imagine anyone whose 12 year-old son has an arsenal like this could probably use them:



Yet, somehow his "essence" is completely overpowered whenever we're driving a pack of Hannah's friends. Which explains why I drive 20 mph over the speed limit with all the windows down. Ventilation. If a cop ever asks why I was doing 50 in a 30 zone, I'm going to ask, "You couldn't tell while you were tailing me?"



Anybody need a reason to go to church EVERY week? After a sermon on Envy, part of a series on the Seven Deadly Sins, Jefferson said, "I don't envy. I am envied." Envied? For what? Your collection of grooming products? Clearly should not have missed that sermon on Pride.

Anybody believe in miracles? Ten miles into our 390 mile drive to northern Michigan, Hannah realized she'd left her phone on my rear bumper when leaving Jefferson's baseball game. We retraced our route and found the phone 2 miles from the field - on I-275. Scraped to hell, but displaying 'one missed call' when I picked it up. "Best Dad in the World" is how I think Hannah described me when I handed her the phone. I'm sure there'll be a time I'll need to remind her of that.

Anybody know a good doctor? This hasn't been the Holiday Season so much as the Hospital Season. First there was Jefferson, who had trouble with peripheral vision during indoor baseball practice, prompting a stop at the Children's Hospital ER on the way from baseball to basketball, where they said it was a pain-free migraine due to junk food and no sleep. Imagine that. He ran out of the hospital, out to the car, changed into his basketball gear, ripped the hospital band from his wrist as he ran onto the court ... and proceeded to score 14 points. Then promptly threw his back out a week later - just like his mom the month before and his dad the month before that. He's seeing an orthopedist on December 22.

Then there's Hannah, who's scheduled for surgery on her jaw on December 21 to determine what's caused the giant cavity in her jaw bone. The doctor is confident it's nothing serious, but we won't know for sure until after Christmas. So if anyone wants to know what we'd like for Christmas, a prayer would be nice. And a smaller deductible (or at least one that doesn't reset January 1).

So that's life at the Szydowski's this year. Sports and Medicine. Confrontation and confidence. Personal grooming and a little good fortune. And one stupid cat. May your lives be as full, if not quite so ulcer-inducing. Anybody got Maalox?

**Merry Christmas All**