

the Famlet monthly

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Dear Family,

So we had dinner at Cafe Rio in Olney on Friday, and, after eating some portion of her burrito, Lucy, in keeping with her wont, wandered out of the restaurant and into the pet store next door. When we went in to retrieve her a little while later I overheard a sales associate extolling the virtues of a particular kind of dog food to a customer. "There's absolutely nothing in here that I wouldn't eat," she gushed, thus reaffirming everything I've always believed about nut jobs who allow animals to live with them.

We have officially joined the ranks of the nut jobs. As Crystal's Facebook friends already know (and I'm really tired of getting scooped by people on Facebook, by the way—have I mentioned how much I dislike Facebook?) our modest two-story dwelling and quarter-acre lot are now home to a man, a woman, four girls and one bitch.

It delights me that our new dog is female so I can call it that. My children castigate me any time I refer to it as *it*, *the dog*, or in any manner that might suggest that it's anything other than a human infant. And so that particular noun—applicable to people and dogs alike—seems especially apt.

Our new bitch is a 12-week-old Golden Doodle. Seriously, a *Golden Doodle*. That's apparently an actual thing—the progeny of a golden retriever and a poodle, I'm told. I've been given a number of assurances about this particular kind of dog, none of which I actually believe. These assurances include that the dog does not shed, is virtually silent, does not smell and is born practically toilet-trained. Because our house is already home to mysterious creatures who have no compunction about smearing poop on the wall, the last two assurances are going to be difficult to prove out. We'll see about the first two.

Furthering their efforts to anthropomorphize our new animal, the girls have adopted the quaint human tradition of giving it a name: Ceres. I'm fairly certain Lucy is responsible for this. Ceres is the Roman goddess of the harvest, fertility and maternal love (I'm not sure why that's relevant to anything, other than that Lucy is an apparent admirer of hers) and nobody seems quite sure how to pronounce it. *Series* seems logical (not to mention consistent with the dictionary) but it sounds to me like the girls are finding consensus on something closer to *say-reez*. That might be right, too, and I don't really care. What annoys me is that we've locked ourselves into a dog's lifetime of likely having to repeat and explain it multiple times whenever anyone asks. My desire to avoid this is one of the reasons I opted to give my children names that most people have heard of. But don't worry if you come to visit and are uncertain of how to pronounce Ceres, because she'll probably also be answering to something else by then (see paragraphs 2 and 4). Let me know if you need help pronouncing it. I can help.

The dog's purchase was what we here in Washington might call a "recess appointment," in that it happened at home while I was out of town (more precisely, in the Dallas Metroplex, where I've been tooling around for three to four days a week essentially since Thanksgiving, and where I am at this moment, which is why nothing potentially offensive in the preceding five paragraphs has been edited out, and also why this sentence is so long). It began with a text from Crystal on Tuesday afternoon informing me that Grant and Jen had just purchased a puppy from a breeder in Virginia and that there was one left in the litter. What happened next is kind of a blur, but when I got home Thursday night Ceres was sleeping in a cardboard box in our basement. The cosmic symmetry of two brothers' owning dogs that are sisters is not entirely lost on me, but I'm not going to get all geeked up over it.

The acquisition has bought me at least one weekend of goodwill with the girls. It has also bought me a period of unquestioned obedience, as intimations that the dog can always be returned (or drop-kicked over the back fence into the creek, or any number of other empty threats that make me a perennial Father of the Year finalist) have contributed to what will likely turn out to be a short-term uptick in compliance.

It would be unfair of me to say that the first few days with the dog haven't been pleasant. She is very cute. (Unlike human babies, *all* puppies are cute.) I was home alone with her for a few hours on Friday morning. She followed me all over the main floor. She can climb and descend the stairs to the basement, which are carpeted, but not the stairs to the second floor, which are not. Whenever I went up she curled up in a ball at the foot of the stairs and resumed following me when I came back down. It was all I could do not to step on her, which I did a couple of times but not on purpose, I promise. We had a little moment when I sat down at the desk in my office; she looked at me lovingly from the doorway and proceeded to relieve herself right there on the hardwood floor. Why she elected to go there rather than taking three steps into the room and soiling my area rug remains a mystery, but I had to give her points for that.

In non-dog news, for 16 and a half years our little family has lived within 11 miles of the U.S. Capitol building. Two Saturdays ago we took our first tour of it together. It was pleasant. The tour begins with an inspiring film that lends the impression that the Capitol is a place of honor and dignity, entirely devoid of weasels. On that count the film is totally bogus, but it's still a good tour. And may I suggest that if you're interested in taking in the monuments and other attractions of downtown Washington but don't like being around a lot of other people, a Saturday morning in February is a very good time to do it.

If you don't live in town, you can stay with us. Crystal is very close to having rendered our new basement guest room and bath inhabitable. Just watch out for the poop.

We send our love.

Tim et al





Why did I finally cave on the dog? I suppose it was to see these expressions on my girls' faces.



What I expect will be one of Sophie's and Lucy's last games of chess before the dog eats all the pieces. (That little spot on the rug under Sophie's right knee is one of her favorite pooping places.)