

the Famlet monthly

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Dear Family,

I am not in the habit of reading many blogs (not because of a shortage of good ones; I'm just not in the habit) but I am a fairly devoted follower of several podcasts. (I'm starting to think this whole internet fad might be here to stay.) One of the podcasts to which I (and about a million other people) subscribe is *This American Life*, a weekly public radio program. If you're not familiar with *This American Life* and would like to be, then I would suggest going to their [archives](#) and listening to the recent episode entitled "Fiasco!" If that episode doesn't hook you, then the podcast is probably not for you.

But what made me think about all this was the episode that aired right after "Fiasco!" entitled "The Seven Things You're Not Supposed to Talk About." In this episode, the overbearingly pretentious-sounding mother of one of the show's producers presents a list of topics that, in her view, should always be avoided in conversation. Not because the topics are rude or controversial, but because they are boring—far less interesting than the person bringing them up believes them to be. The objective of the episode was to find an interesting story about each of the seven forbidden topics that essentially would prove the overbearingly pretentious-sounding mother wrong.

The list of verboten topics did not originate with the pretentious mother, but with a friend of hers from—where else?—France. For some reason, knowing this is helpful to me.

The seven topics (in no particular order—just as I happen to remember them) are: 1) your diet; 2) the route you took to get here (e.g., "I started on the Beltway but bailed out on River Road because of the traffic..."); 3) how you slept; 4) your dreams; 5) your garden-variety illness (i.e., your cancer is interesting, but no one really cares about your cold and flu symptoms); 6) menstruation; and 7) money.

The list resonated with me—you'll have to believe me when I tell you that I was able to recall all seven items just sitting here at my desk, without the aid of Google or anything else—because it has occurred to me that if I were to follow strictly the overbearingly pretentious-sounding mother's counsel, these letters would be a lot shorter than they are.

Take last month, when I devoted more than half the letter to my plantar wart, which would seem to violate Number 5. Last month's letter, however, elicited more responses than any letter I have ever written, so perhaps the pretentious mother's pretentious French friend was wrong. The hole in my foot, by the way, is almost all the way

healed—down to just a small scab that I often forget is there. My running shoes are back in business, and I recorded my first sub-40-minute 5-miler at [yesterday's Montgomery County Road Runners Turkey Burnoff](#).

Which reminds me, I have two proposed additions to the taboo-topic list: 8) your exercise regimen and/or accomplishments; and 9) your new house or renovation. I'm sure it's nice for you, but, unless you're offering to put me up, I really don't care.

Incidentally, as you might guess, I live in a house of near-perpetual Number 6. I spare you these stories not because I think you'll find them boring, but because I wish to remain alive. I guess I could have told the story of when we discovered that Grace had been hoarding discarded tampon applicators that she believed to be Happy Meal toys, but that's not very interesting.

You might not know that Crystal and I are fairly firm believers in (though far from perfect practitioners of) a high-fat, low-carbohydrate diet, because I never write about it. This is not out of respect to taboo Number 1 (to which local family members can attest, since we *talk* about it *ad nauseum*) but because the arguments in its favor are neither entertaining nor particularly well suited to a one-page letter.

As for Number 3, it seems that school, early-morning seminary and swimming are conspiring to ensure that Hannah never gets a good night's sleep. This year, her high school swim team has moved its practices to 5:30 a.m. Upon being told by Hannah that that time would not work for her, her coach asked incredulously, "What conflict could you possibly have at 5:30 in the morning?" Listening to Hannah describe the expression on the coach's face as she explained the conflict was both entertaining and familiar. (When learning about seminary, everybody has the same facial expression and asks the same questions: *What time? And that's every morning? Wait, what time?*) Anyway, the coach is allowing Hannah's club team practices to count as school team practices, so long as Hannah provides notes from her other swim coach and her seminary teacher confirming her attendance at both things. So that was nice of her.

Number 2: We're going to have to figure out some new and creative ways for getting to Rockville during rush hour so Sophie can attend rehearsals of the county's middle school honors chorus. She was concerned about some things she had not gotten quite right during her audition, but I guess she was good enough. We are happy for her.

Sorry for not getting to any of my dreams. Maybe next month.

May your holiday season be merry and bright.

Love,

Tim et al





Some people (e.g., Crystal) bundled up for the 27-degree, Saturday-after-Thanksgiving Turkey Burnoff...



...and a few of us wore shorts.



Five Brothers on the Friday after Thanksgiving (I'm the handsome one.)