

THE FAMLET

MONTHLY



Dear Family,

For Christmas, you may recall, Crystal gave me a new triathlon bike. A little more than a month later, for my birthday, Crystal presented me with a \$2,500 repair bill for our 13-year-old minivan.

A couple of weeks after that, I took my 12-year-old sedan in for scheduled service. A little over \$1,600 later, I rolled out of there like a boss with two new tires, a lovely new set of valve cover gaskets, a freshly flushed transmission, and a new right axle shaft and right side rack boot, among various other things.

Apart from the tires, I have only a vague notion of what any of those things are. We've been taking our cars to Quality Discount Tire in Kensington for many years because the people there make us feel comfortable. If they are exploiting our automotive ignorance (and I don't think they are, but if they are) then they seem to be doing it competently and with a smile, and that almost makes it worthwhile.

I was feeling okay about my lot until a couple of days ago when I received a string of warning alerts from Quicken that I had obliterated my monthly budget for "Auto Service & Parts." I honestly couldn't tell you what my monthly budget is for "Auto Service & Parts," but it doesn't surprise me that it's less than \$4,165, and Quicken obviously felt it was important to communicate this to me in several different ways, including text message, email, and several pop-up banner alerts from the app. It annoys me that Quicken seems to think that I have been making too many impulse buys at the "Auto Service & Parts" store and I



Sophie and Grace share a cake with two missionaries serving in our ward on Valentine's Day.



My tri bike, yesterday, about an hour after getting hit by a car.

would probably do well to get that under control. I don't know about other people, but sometimes I just wake up in the morning with an insatiable need to replace my front axle, fix the brakes, and get the alignment done. I'll try to do better next month, I promise. We'll still need to replace the catalytic converter (\$700) on the van if we want the check engine light to turn off, but our friends at Quality Discount Tire told Crystal that we don't technically have to do that until our next biennial state emissions test. Love those guys. Quicken will be so happy.

It's probably just in my DNA, but I continue to cling to the belief that driving two cars with a combined age of 25 years and 275,000 miles is more economical than the alternative. A couple more months like this could change my mind.

I used to think that cycling would be a less expensive way of getting around than driving. That was before I got into triathlon. I spent three hours in Arlington earlier this month getting my new tri bike fit to me. (Hopefully I'm done growing.) I really do like it. It does not handle as easily as my road bike, and it's a little heavier, which makes climbing more of a challenge. Both of these things I understand to be fairly common trade-offs for tri bikes. What you get in return on open straightaways is the satisfaction of blowing past other bikes and the fabulous sensation that you might be on the verge of taking flight.

I was not fast enough yesterday, however, to avoid being rear-ended by a car on Sligo Creek Parkway. I'm a little fuzzy on how it happened. I was moving at a pretty decent clip, probably closer to the center of the lane than most drivers would prefer, when I felt a violent shove from behind. It took me a moment to process what had occurred, and it must have felt worse than it actually was because I didn't fall over. I stopped and had a brief, surprisingly civil conversation with the driver of the Genesis coupe that had struck me. I was a little rattled but fine, and, more important, my bike had not sustained any damage. This is good because I'm pretty sure I've already exceeded my "Cycling" budget in Quicken, and I'm tired of getting yelled at.

This letter so far has been the long way of saying that we're not feeling especially flush this month, which is why I especially appreciated being handed Grace's birthday wish list a few hours ago. (She turns 12 in a week and a half.) The wide-ranging list includes:



Sophie, above, and Grace and a fellow Girl Scout, below, celebrate World Thinking Day



Members of Sophie's troop celebrate World Thinking Day

- My own phone
- Laptop
- Willow tree
- Tickets to *Hamilton*
- New cardigan
- Lipgloss
- Stuffed animals

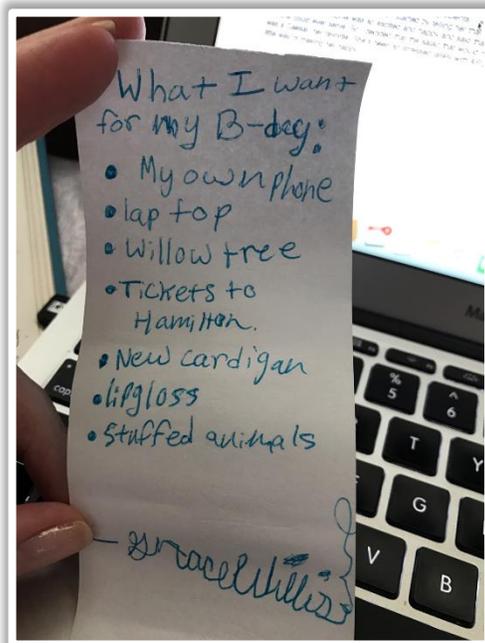
If you would like to help with any of the first four items, we would appreciate it. The one thing on the list I can assure you she will *not* get is more stuffed animals. *Hamilton* tickets are a long shot, too.

Hannah was transferred this month back down to what she calls "the valley," which I gather from context to mean Phoenix and environs. She began her mission with a brief stint in the valley before being transferred "up north" to Cottonwood, an hour's drive southwest of Flagstaff, with lovely Sedona in between. She would spend the next 42 weeks in Cottonwood and surrounding towns, notably the metropolis of Cornville, whose elevation (3,225 feet) nearly matches its population (3,280—roughly a quarter the size of Cottonwood). Forty-two weeks is an extraordinarily long time for a missionary to be assigned to any one place, and Hannah had begun to wonder whether she would finish her mission there. Her pre-transfer letters suggested she would have been perfectly content to, but her post-transfer letters also convey happiness at being in north Phoenix, where, fittingly, she now lives on West Maryland Avenue. With just 19 weeks to go, some of us are wondering whether she has been transferred for the last time.

More than a decade has passed since I taught my last seminary class, but I still remember how miserable February could be. Even the most engaged students didn't seem to want to be there, and the whole exercise felt like a chore. Teaching in February has been doubly difficult for Crystal because she's had to try to quell the near-constant hum of chatter that emanates from the back of the room with her right foot in an air cast—the result of her bunionectomy three weeks ago. She had the same procedure performed on her left foot three years ago, and if this recovery tracks that one, it'll be at least another three weeks before she's back on her bike and in the pool. She is trying not to go stir-crazy in the meantime.



Grace, second from left, and fellow troop members sell cookies outside Parkway Deli in Chevy Chase, Md.



Evidence that I was not making up the birthday list. I love that Grace signed her name at the bottom. Like she was submitting a purchase order to procurement or something

Lucy and Sophie both landed roles in the Northwood H.S. production of *Legally Blonde* April 27th, 28th, and 29th. Book your flights now. More details to follow.

We send our love.

-Tim *et al.*