

THE FAMLET MONTHLY



Dear Family,

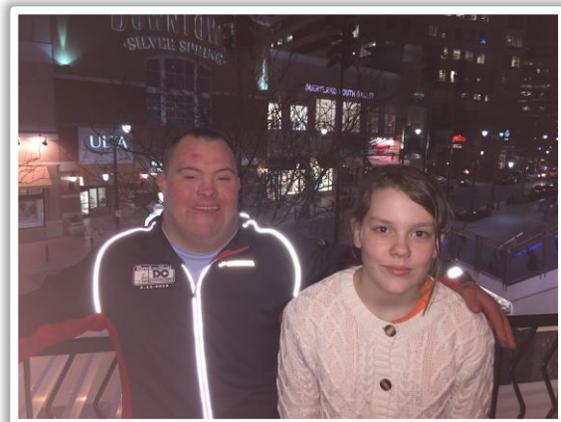
Whatever economies we achieve by driving old cars (see [last month's letter](#)), buying GMO-, pesticide- and hormone-laden, non-organic food (see below), and taking infrequent, relatively inexpensive vacations, we're probably passing most of the savings through to Verizon. Grace's 12th birthday means that we are now a one-income, six-iPhone family.

The age at which each successive daughter has successfully cajoled us into bestowing a smartphone upon her has predictably declined over the years. Hannah had to wait until she turned 16 for hers. That phone, incidentally, has been sitting idle somewhere in the house since she left on her mission 15 months ago because I am either too sentimental, too stupid, or just too lazy to suspend the service on it. The upshot of this is that every month we now pay roughly the same amount to Verizon, which also supplies our internet, TV, and the landline we never use (or answer when it rings) as we paid to our first landlord in Maryland nearly 21 years ago. Back then we were a zero-income, zero-iPhone family. It's possible that we were familiar with the term *cell phone*, but it's at least as likely that we weren't, and we certainly didn't own one.

We also spend considerably more on milk now than we did then. Every ten days or so Crystal buys four gallons. We typically opt for the non-organic variety because we already have a religion we like and are not inclined to start tithing to another one. But earlier this month Crystal accidentally picked up a gallon of organic mixed in with the other three. The annoyance I initially felt at this was quickly displaced by excitement at the



Sophie, Grace, Lucy, and Grandpa celebrate Grace's 12th birthday at Masa Hibachi in Silver Spring.



Pete, who turned 34 this month, and Grace on Grace's 12th birthday in Silver Spring.

opportunity I now had to dispel, once and for all, the myth that organic milk tastes better. Crystal set up the experiment by pouring identical glasses of each kind...

And...

And, well, dammit if the organic milk didn't taste better! At first I couldn't figure out why I hadn't noticed this before. After all, I'd had organic milk elsewhere and hadn't noticed anything particularly great about it. But then I realized I hadn't really had organic *milk* before. What I'd had elsewhere was organic *dairy product* that perhaps started out as organic milk but, somewhere between the udder and my glass, had some (or all) of its fat removed, thus rendering it impotable. I like to think we are a loving and tolerant family, but we just don't allow that kind of junk in our house. If it doesn't have a red cap on it, it may come from a cow, but it isn't milk. This is not how I was reared, but I am nevertheless prepared to go to war in defense of this critically important principle.

We remain non-organic consumers for now. Perhaps if I get a raise (or if the girls start chipping in their portion of the Verizon bill) we can start buying the expensive milk on purpose.

Our children, for their part, have rather inexpensive tastes, for which we are grateful. Sophie and I recently visited the DSW at Wheaton Plaza to replace the dress shoes she "accidentally" kicked up onto that long, inaccessible ledge that runs along the top of the stage, some 18 feet above the floor of our church gym. Many of our church gyms have such ledges, and while I imagine they serve some purpose other than to irretrievably collect balls, shoes, frisbees, and other stuff that kids throw up there, I'm not sure what it is. So Sophie picked out a sensible pair of flats for well under \$50, and afterwards I suggested she choose a place in the mall for us to have dinner. The mall has a variety of fast food, fast casual, and inexpensive table-service dining options. Sophie opted for Café Costco, where she had the Caesar salad and I had two hot dogs. Total dinner check: \$6.99, plus tax, no tip. Boom. Thank you very much. We then went to the Batman Lego movie, which Sophie says was good. As almost always happens in those theaters with the fully reclining seats, I fell asleep 20 minutes in.

Sophie and I saved quite a bit of money on this month's Rock n Roll Washington DC Marathon (and Half) by registering a year in advance. It was my 10th marathon (if you count the marathon at the end of last year's

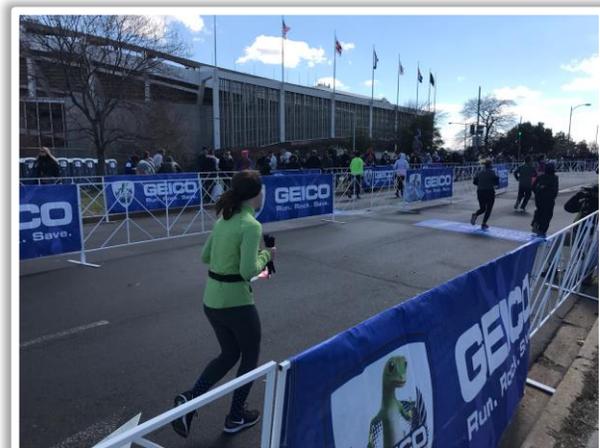


Choose the right.



Sophie's \$3.99 Caesar salad. One of the 5 foods she eats.

Sophie approaches the finish line of the RnR DC Half-Marathon.



Ironman Maryland, which I do) and Sophie's first half. Our performance was commensurate with our training. Sophie barely trained at all—I don't know when she would have found the time to; she maintains an impossibly busy schedule—and my training was interrupted by two brief bouts with incapacitating illness during January and February. (I hereby resolve to start getting flu shots again next year.) It was 20 degrees at the start—perhaps 30 at the finish—and 20-MPH winds made it feel much worse. Sophie was content to finish, and I was delighted for her. As for my race, I went out way too fast for my current level of fitness, hit the wall harder than I've ever hit it on mile 18, took 20 minutes longer to complete the second half than the first half, and posted my worst time since 2014 (if you don't count the marathon at the end of Ironman Maryland, which I don't). Shortly after I crossed the finish line, some race volunteer had the nerve to hand me a carton of fat-free chocolate "milk." I choked down a couple awful sips and chucked the rest in the general vicinity of the nearest trash can.

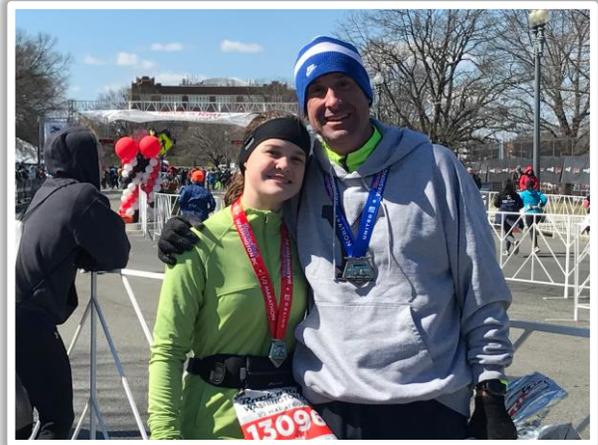
Singing is free (if you ignore the cost of Crystal's, Lucy's, and Grace's voice lessons) and Grace did a lot of it this month. Last night her a cappella group performed at some event in the Loiderman Middle School gym for which the school charged \$15(!!!) at the door. I stayed until Grace's group performed and then explained to Crystal that I had to leave for several reasons, including (1) my butt can only handle metal folding chairs for 45 minutes at a time, and (2) the emcees, who clearly had been brought in from out of town, since they referred to the place where we live as "Silver Springs," were too excited and beyond insufferable. Crystal understood, and I went home. Early in the month, Grace's county-wide middle school honors chorus performed and sounded quite lovely. (I stayed the whole time for that.) And at last week's county chorus festival, her school's chorus scored highly enough to be invited to the state festival. (I stayed for all of that, too, in part because I was the accompanist.)

In an effort to save money on family home evening treats, the girls suggested we go to Rita's two Mondays ago where they were giving away free Italian Ices to mark the first day of spring. It was the girls' cousins' idea to go, and we met them there with Grandma (their parents were in New York for some concert). Rita's is overrated but I agreed to this outing to win



Above: A very slow 45-year-old man stumbles to an unimpressive marathon finish

Below: Happy reunion at the finish line.



points with my girls and make them think I'm a good dad.

That façade lasted right up until we pulled into the parking lot and I saw the line wrapped halfway around the building, which predictably sent me into Donkey Kong mode. Rather than taking advantage of the line to visit with my wife, mother, daughters, niece, and nephews, I spent the whole time fuming about how we live in a place where the prevailing wisdom holds that no human's time is worth less than \$15 an hour, and yet we're all willing to stand in a 45-minute line on a 48-degree evening to get a \$2.79 Italian Ice "for free."

I'm kind of a moron, and in the end the line only took about 20 minutes, which means we still overpaid for the free Ices, but everyone else had a nice time. I am grateful for my family's willingness to put up with my irrational overreactions and will try to do better next time.

I am grateful for the opportunity life gives to improve and am grateful for you.

Love,

Tim

Grace, annoyed that I wanted to take her picture at the end of her honors chorus concert – Watkins Mill H.S., March 2, 2017.

