

THE FAMLET

MONTHLY



Dear Family,

Under ordinary circumstances, if you were planning a road trip from Silver Spring, Maryland, to Provo, Utah, and trying to get there as quickly as possible, you probably wouldn't plot a course that took you through Frankfort, Kentucky.

Hannah's cross-country odyssey back to school, with four friends, two cars, and a fair amount of anxiety (mainly from Grace) began yesterday afternoon. The travelers attended our ward's sacrament meeting at 11:00 a.m., taught their respective Sunday School classes at 12:20, blew off Relief Society and Priesthood meeting, and rolled out of the church parking lot, headed west, at around 1:25 p.m. The planned overnight stops—in Frankfort, Kansas City, and Denver—were chosen primarily based on the existence of acquaintances in those places who expressed a willingness to lodge the itinerant students for free.

Hannah and J.T., a friend from Williamsburg, are driving Hannah's "new" 2007 Honda Accord with Alaska tags, which we purchased eight days ago from my cousin, Maj. Michael Willis. The suspicious-looking exchange of money, keys, and title occurred at 7:30 a.m. in the parking lot of a Comfort Inn in Springfield, Va., where Mike was staying while awaiting transport to Brasilia, where he and his family will be living for the next year or so, courtesy of the U.S. Army. Hyrum and Mariann Higgins are driving the other car in the caravan—a (circa) 1995 Ford Escort station wagon.

I have a hard time envisioning a scenario in which this trip goes exactly according to plan. But Hannah's a



Above: The girls display their new Bermudan flag—a gift from Flora Duffy's mum (background between Hannah and Grace)

Below: With Flora Duffy's parents at the ITU World Triathlon Series Race – Montreal – 5 Aug 2017



pretty smart girl, J.T. seems like a reasonable boy, and Hyrum and Mariann are the two oldest Higgins children. Faithful readers of this letter with good memories may recall that the Higginses are arguably the world's greatest family. And so I'm pretty sure they'll be fine, but all the same, I expect I'll generally feel better about life around this time on Wednesday.

Hannah's 2007 Accord is our family's newest and lowest-mileage car. My 2005 Toyota Avalon is still going strong, but it doesn't see a lot of action these days since I still have yet to commute to my firm's new Arlington office other than by bike.

Faithful readers may recall last month's description of my daily commute—now down to 13.7 miles each way because I continue to discover new ways of shortening it. Although typically uneventful, there remains a two-mile stretch of Rock Creek & Potomac Parkway on which I get honked at at least once a day and shouted at perhaps three times per week. Motorists elsewhere tend to be more courteous, and so I have given some thought as to what it might be about this particular segment of road that causes so many drivers to become enraged at my presence.

I have several hypotheses. The most likely explanation, I feel, is the existence of a bike path that is separate but visible from the roadway. Based on what I can piece together from what gets shouted at me, it sounds as though some drivers feel that I ought to be on this path. It's hard to tell for sure since I can't always understand what they're saying. (If you happen to be one of those people who feel inclined to yell tips out your car window at cyclists as you whiz by, we'd appreciate it if you enunciated and kept them brief—anything more than two or three words just gets lost in the traffic.) But among the jumble of sounds that emerge from cars, it seems like I can generally make out “bike path.” Some drivers and passengers also gesture toward it, as if to call it to my attention.

I can understand why drivers become frustrated with cyclists who opt for the road over a nearby bike path. I imagine some are under the (mistaken) impression that the presence of a bike path makes it illegal to ride on the road. Or perhaps they know the law but just find me annoying. I am not opposed to riding on the bike path *per se*, but the path alongside Rock Creek Parkway is—not to put too fine a point on it—a piece of crap. It's bumpy and covered with so much sand in places where the creek has recently flooded that



Above: The girls—Botanical Garden--Montreal. 5 Aug 2017

Below: Drummondville Ward—Quebec – 6 Aug 2017



cyclists have to walk their bikes. If the National Park Service wants to improve the trail surface to where it's consistently no worse than the road surface, then I'll consider riding on it. Until then, drivers are just going to have to keep taking their blood pressure meds and courageously honking and hurling insults at me from the safety of their fast-moving, protective metal cocoons. Intriguingly, no driver has ever attempted to communicate with me while we're both stopped at a light. Maybe it's the pink, purple, and yellow L.L. Bean backpack I wear (Grace's from kindergarten) that they find so intimidating.

We tried to make the most of Hannah's nearly six weeks at home, which ended yesterday. This month started with a long weekend in Montreal. The nine-hour drives each way were surprisingly pleasant and mostly uneventful. Once there, we amused ourselves with mostly touristy things—Mont Royal, Old Montreal, the Biodome, Insectarium, Botanical Gardens, three separate trips to Tim Horton's and a Costco run. Amazingly, Costco in Canada has the same \$1.50 hot dog/soda combo that we have in the U.S., but it's only \$1.50 *Canadian*. An even *better* deal!

Our Sunday plan (we always need a Sunday plan) was to drop in on the Drummondville Ward, about an hour outside of Montreal toward Quebec City, and then spend the afternoon wandering around Quebec City. We chose Drummondville because it is the home of Sister Champoux, Hannah's last missionary companion. We guessed that might be her family's ward, and we were right. Sister Champoux is still a missionary, but we found her family after sacrament meeting, and they graciously invited us over for lunch. We accepted their invitation and then stuck around for the entire afternoon. We played several games, including bilingual versions of Pictionary and Taboo, which was both interesting and fun. We probably overstayed our welcome by at least a couple of hours, and we never made it to Quebec City, but I don't think we would have enjoyed it as much as we enjoyed Sister Champoux's family. My French-speaking encounters in the Drummondville Ward and chez les Champoux were similar to my encounters throughout Quebec. They would start with a few brief pleasantries during which the person would say something kind about how well I had maintained my French—and then say something I couldn't understand and immediately switch over into English.



Above: With Sister Champoux's mom (center) – 6 Aug 2017



Above: Last night in Montreal—along the St Lawrence River

Below: A bunch of relatives behind the Governor's Palace – Colonial Williamsburg—17 Aug 2017



We hadn't really planned out Saturday in Montreal, and so I dragged the girls down to the waterfront to watch the elite women's race of the ITU World Triathlon Series, which happened to be in town. I held out some faint hope that the girls might be able to meet Flora Duffy—last year's ITU world champion and this year's dominant force with five wins and one second-place finish in six races. We didn't get to meet Flora, but we did get to watch the entire race alongside her mom and dad.

Flora's parents were delightful. Anyone who knows me well knows that chatting up strangers isn't really my thing, but I'm a pretty big Flora Duffy fan and on this occasion my inner fanboy would not be denied. They were understandably very proud of their daughter, and even after it became clear that she was destined to finish second—30 seconds behind with less than a kilometer to go on the run—her dad still believed she could win. "She *never* quits," he kept repeating. "She *never* gives up." It occurred to me to wonder how successful my daughters might be if they had a dad like that.

While we were at the race, Sophie asked me whether she could be as good as Flora Duffy if she trained really, really hard. In what will go down as yet another one of my patented Father-of-the-Year moments, I gazed into her optimistic, big brown eyes and told her I didn't think so.

But if that's what Sophie wants to do, then it's hard to imagine even the world's least supportive father getting in the way of it. Hers is an indomitable spirit—the rarest of specimens for whom failure seems to just make her want to try harder. It's not that she doesn't get discouraged. She does. But like Flora Duffy's dad, I've never seen Sophie give up at anything. Ever since being installed as our ward organist a couple of months ago, she has totally thrown herself into it—even though, as anyone who's tried it knows, coordinating all four of your limbs to make an organ sound good is really, really hard.

Many newer organs have a "bass coupler" setting that makes it sound as though a novice organist is playing the pedals, even when she is not. Our meetinghouse's 50-year-old pipe organ has no such feature. And unlike piano, when you flub on the organ (especially on the pedals) even tone-deaf people know it. It can be a



Cutting the third hour of church to say good-bye to Hannah yesterday. (And, look, I finally shaved my Trek beard!)

demoralizing learning curve (I know). But Sophie doesn't seem to mind climbing it, and it makes me proud.

As life would have it, we learned via text that my Uncle Rick had passed away while we were sharing a six-pound milkshake at Chick & Ruth's Delly in Annapolis with Aunt Rebecca and Uncle Gary. We had learned just a few hours earlier that Rick didn't have much time when Mom called with me the news. "My brother is dying," she told me through tears. I don't remember ever hearing her so distraught—even when her parents died. I will remember Rick's distinctive voice, his gentle demeanor, and his willingness to let me to swipe Cokes from his basement fridge. I imagine he got angry at times, but I can't picture it. He probably did not honk at cyclists.

Rick's funeral meant that Mom and Coco got to attend an impromptu family reunion in Utah instead of our planned family reunion in Williamsburg. Ours was probably hotter. If someone put a gun to my head and ordered me to say something nice about Colonial Williamsburg, I might reply that the buildings are air conditioned. If ordered to say two nice things, I might not survive the encounter. The day at Busch Gardens was my favorite. I'd forgotten how awesome that place is—like HersheyPark with shorter lines (at least on the day we went), more flora and fewer tattoos. But the whole weekend was a swell reminder of how lucky I am to have been born into such a kind and loving family.

I love you. -Tim