

THE FAMLET

MONTHLY



Dear Family,

Earlier this week over dinner, after calling my attention to a booger that had found its way onto my upper lip, Grace announced that she was *not* embarrassed by me.

She then proceeded to tick off a list of things I do that other seventh graders might find embarrassing. On most mornings I ride my bike past her school bus stop, wave at her, and sometimes blow her a kiss. This alone might be sufficiently mortifying for the average middle schooler, and it probably doesn't help that I'm dressed like a cyclist—i.e., like a doofus—and carry my work clothes in the bright, colorful backpack that Grace used in kindergarten before “outgrowing” it. Grace says her friends sometimes ask her how embarrassing this is for her, but she tells them it does not embarrass her at all.

It gives me hope that if I don't embarrass her as seventh grader, I might never embarrass her. Like her older sisters, she even holds my hand in public. I don't know if that's weird, but it makes me happy.

I got a flat on my way in to work on Thursday. Fortunately, I was carrying a spare inner tube. Unfortunately, my spare also had a hole in it. (I probably should stop buying my tubes in bulk from the cheapest place on Amazon.) And so I sat in the grass next to my bike alongside Ridge Road in Rock Creek Park and waited for another cyclist to come by and bail me out. Cyclists are cool that way, and sure enough,



Above: Grace and Sophie eat pastry — 12 September 2017

Below: The backpack that I wear to work. If you see a 45-year-old guy on a bike wearing this, try not to hit him.



the third guy had an extra tube and gave it to me. Good karma for him. I need to pay it forward.

I fixed the tire but noticed that my wheel was wobbling slightly. I couldn't figure out why, and so I rode to the Trek shop in Georgetown, about a mile from the office. The tech looked at my wheel for about two seconds and asked if I knew I had a broken spoke. I didn't—and even if I did, it would not have occurred to me that one broken spoke—this particular wheel has 24 spokes—would cause it to wobble. A sermon based on this principle basically writes itself.

The bike shop guy told me I shouldn't ride with a broken spoke (though I just had for several miles on busy roads at high speed) but he didn't have time to fix it right then and so he offered me a “complimentary” loaner to ride to work while he fixed it.

At this point I realized I was going to overpay for the repair. The loaner was a \$5,000 electric bicycle that was a lot of fun to ride and that I spent the rest of the day worrying someone would steal out of the office garage. If you've never ridden an e bike, I recommend it—it's fun. Fortunately, no one stole it, and at the end of the day I returned to the bike shop to retrieve my bike and pay \$42 for one spoke, the labor associated with installing one spoke, and one very expensive spare inner tube that damn well better not have a hole in it. The cost of the repair was defrayed in part by a \$20 voucher, redeemable only at bike shops, that my employer gives me each month to help cover bike commuting expenses. It doesn't sound like much (and it isn't) but it's \$20 more than they have to give me, and a quick perusal of IRS Publication 15-B reveals that this is in fact the largest tax-exempt benefit an employer can provide for bike commuting.

This reminded me of an encounter I had several years ago in downtown Silver Spring with a man who was campaigning for some Green nut who was mounting a quixotic primary challenge to the left of our Democratic then-Congressman (now-U.S. Senator) Chris Van Hollen. I told the campaigner that he was wasting his time talking to someone like me, but then he noticed that I was wearing a “Bike to Work Day” t-shirt. (This was not some cosmic coincidence. Apart from dress shirts, suits, sport coats, and slacks, about 90 percent of my remaining wardrobe consists of race swag and old Bike to Work Day t-shirts. I'm actually wearing one now.) He told me that if elected, his guy would fight to get me a little something for biking to work. I smugly replied that he *really* was talking to the



Above: Sophie and Ceres—Woods behind the house 3 Sept 2017

Below: With Tony Kornheiser at his Washington D.C. restaurant, Chatter, 11 September 2017



wrong guy and that I thought it was wasteful for the government to pay people to do things they are inclined to do anyway. I still claim to feel this way, although by redeeming my \$20 tax-free voucher this week (and wishing the amount were higher) I have exposed the naked hypocrisy of my stated position. Alas, if only this were the extent of my hypocrisy.

It seems like a long time ago, but Sophie and a fellow Girl Scout began September by spending a morning soliciting donations for Hurricane Harvey relief from commuters as they entered the Forest Glen Metro station. They brought some baked goods to sell in exchange for the donations, but most donors didn't take anything and in two hours the girls collected more than eight hundred dollars. I am given to understand that this money was passed along to the Red Cross (and I'm sure it was) but if you're not a particularly scrupulous person, are a little short of cash, and have a cute teenage daughter, I might suggest you wait for the next highly publicized natural disaster, get her a Girl Scout vest and a collection box, and send her to a suburban Metro station during rush hour. It's probably easier than busking.

Sophie is the only member of our immediate family in Crystal's early-morning seminary class this year. She is joined by two cousins (Alex and Abby) and about 20 other high school students, mostly from our ward but also several from Grant's ward and a couple of other neighboring wards.

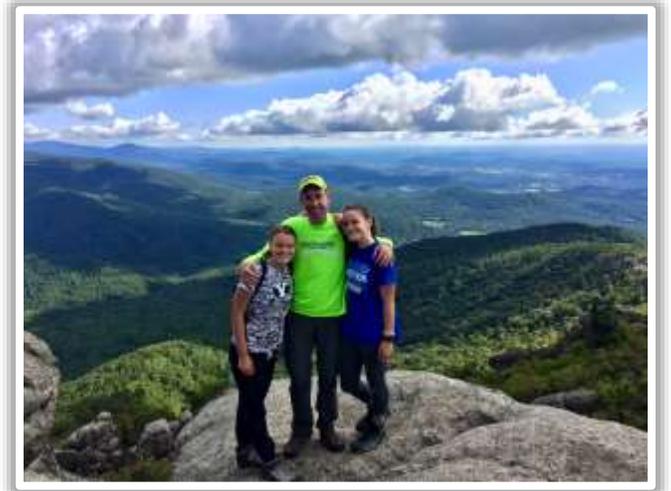
I get the sense that the class is going well. We're always happy when teenagers ask questions that indicate they are wrestling with challenging spiritual concepts. One boy asked Crystal whether he would be able to play basketball in the Celestial Kingdom. I think she told him that she didn't know, but that he would have a body, and so he probably could if he wanted to. (For my part, I have long struggled to understand how sports could be interesting in an existence where everyone has an incorruptible, perfected body, but no one's asking me.) A couple of days later the same student asked Crystal if she would be willing to open the church an hour before seminary so that he could play basketball in the gym. Seminary starts at 6:15 a.m. Crystal told him that she arrives at 6:00, and he could come then if he wanted. I'm not sure whether he has.

Sophie and Crystal were the only members of the family who got to hear Gladys Knight's Grammy-



Above: Sophie and Adrianna solicit Harvey donations— Sept 1st

Below: With Lucy and Sophie atop Old Rag Mountain — Sept 9th



winning gospel choir, Saints Unified Voices, perform at the Washington D.C. stake center a couple of weeks ago. By all accounts it was a fabulously uplifting pair of “firesides.” (Those of us who were involved in the planning were explicitly instructed not to refer to it as a “Gladys Knight concert.”) But whatever it was, it was great and it drew a couple thousand people—many of whom likely never would have otherwise set foot in a Mormon meetinghouse. They all got to hear her fabulous pipes (remarkably at 73 she can still bring it) and why she joined the Church 20 years ago.

I was assigned to work the parking lot, which meant I got to wear a fancy orange vest and act like I knew what I was doing, even though I did not. I made lots of official-looking gestures with my hands and arms that were not particularly helpful. That we did not have an 18-car pileup on Stoneybrook Drive can really be attributed only to divine providence. The stake center where the firesides took place is just up the hill from the temple, and between the stake center, the temple, and the visitors’ center (three parking lots that border one another but do not connect to one another) we had about 700 parking spots. This was enough in theory, but it turns out that when your main attraction is a 73-year-old singer, what we really needed was about 600 *handicap* spots. And I quickly learned that hell hath no fury like someone with a handicap placard being directed to a spot more than five steps away from the building entrance. Fortunately, I was paired up with the elders quorum president from the Laurel Ward, who also happens to be a Maryland state trooper. Now *that* guy knows how to direct traffic and not put up with any attitude from people. And so I let him do all the heavy lifting, while I pretended to look official. It was fun.

Lucy is easing into post-secondary education with two courses—English and Drama—at Montgomery College’s Takoma Park campus. Neither English nor drama is an alien concept to Lucy, and she seems to be off to a good start. She has expressed little interest in learning how to drive and gets to class each day by way of two County “Ride-On” buses, which her student ID entitles her to ride without paying. She is also enjoying her institute of religion class at the University of Maryland on Wednesday nights.

Last month’s letter ended with Hannah about to embark on a three-and-a-half-day cross-country drive to Provo. I am happy to report that she and the car



Grace and Sophie—First day of school —5 September 2017

arrived safely in Provo and she is now fully entrenched in BYU’s vaunted nursing program. She has her blue and white scrubs, her stethoscope, and everything. She seems happy.

We are happy. I hope you are happy.

Love, Tim

