

THE FAMLET

MONTHLY



Dear Family,

My dentist recently told me that I was his most difficult patient. I smiled at him and he clarified that he was referring to my bite, but I think we both know what he meant.

I am now 28 weeks into an Invisalign treatment that I was told would correct my bite in 19 weeks. In hindsight, it seemed overly optimistic on my part to believe this would work, and it hasn't.

But my dentist (Dr. Toussaint Crawford, whom I like and who I think is smart even though nothing about this treatment has gone as he predicted) is not a quitter. He told me on Thursday that he had recently completed a course in "Propel" orthodontics, which apparently involves drilling a series of "micro-osteoperforations" in my teeth. For reasons that I still don't understand even after listening to Dr. Crawford explain it to me three times using small words, this is supposed to accelerate the movement of my teeth in response to orthodontic treatment. It sounds like he just learned how to do it last weekend, so what could possibly go wrong?

I'm having the procedure on Friday, and so if you are one of the dentists who is related to me, and you think this is a bad idea, you have until then to warn me. (Unfortunately, I don't think my brother, [Matthew Willis, DDS](#), actually reads my letters, and so it might have to be a more distant relative.) I'm not holding out much hope that the perforations will actually do any good, but to paraphrase the apocryphal quote attributed to Niels Bohr when someone, upon noticing the horseshoe over his door, asked whether he actually



Above: Triumphant poses near the end of the Sea Gull Century

Below: An Assateague pony eats garbage.



believed in that sort of thing, “Of course not, but I’m told you don’t have to believe in it for it to work.”

Speaking of things that may or may not work, I got a flu shot this week—my first such shot in many years. I don’t consider myself anti-vax (or anti-science) but I’ve never had much faith in flu shots because it seems like they’re always guessing about what they’re inoculating against every year. I was forced to rethink my position last year when I was the only one in the house to come down with something that felt a lot like the flu. I’ve also been told by smart people that I’ve actually been a socially irresponsible jerk for not getting a flu shot because I risk exposing higher-risk segments of the population to the disease.

And so I got the shot—ultimately for the same reason that I recycle plastic bottles, even though I’m not persuaded that doing so benefits the environment in any meaningful way. I do both things 1) because they’re easy and 2) so people won’t think I’m a sociopath.

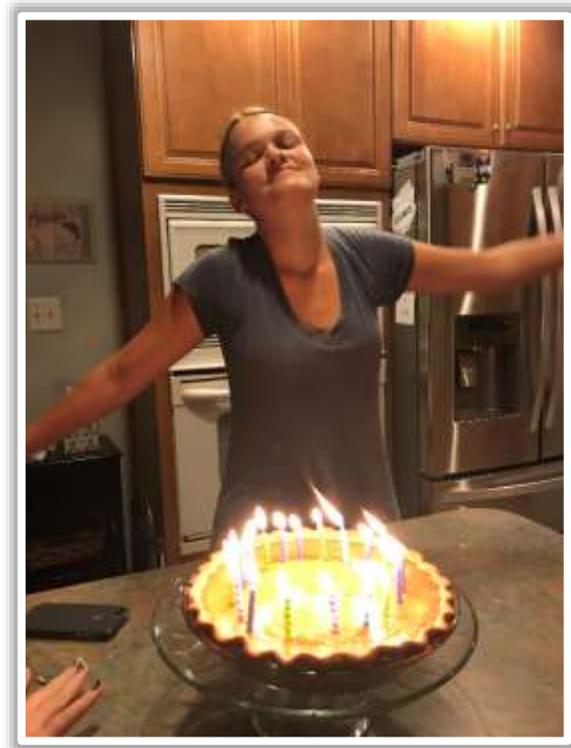
The quarterly water bill arrived this month—\$413.60, which seems like a lot to me. According to the bill, “typical” daily water consumption is 55 gallons per person, and the five people living in our house go through 298 gallons per day (a little under 60 gallons apiece).

At first that doesn’t sound so bad for us. After all, Pepco sends us a shaming bar chart every month illustrating how much more electricity we use than our more energy-efficient neighbors. But then I remembered that I seldom take more than 1 or 2 showers per week at home. I do almost all of my showering either at the YMCA (after swimming) or at the office (after biking in). And so I’m starting to wonder what “typical” means. I might be wrong, but I’m guessing that the three adolescent girls living in my house spend more aggregate time in the shower than three comparably aged boys would—and possibly more time than any three other people on earth. Grace in particular is one to savor every luxurious moment of life and is never in a hurry to finish anything. Sometimes I knock on the bathroom door after 45 minutes or so and ask whether she’s about done. This invariably prompts an annoyed reply implying that she has spent the last 44 and a half minutes vainly searching every corner of the tub for the shampoo bottle. (It’s also remarkable to me how much shampoo we go through.)



Above: Crystal's birthday cake.

Below: Lucy, age 18, and her birthday pie



Grace, our family's only extrovert, continues to enjoy the social aspects of middle school. Until recently, I did not believe it was humanly possible to like middle school, but Grace appears to. Her favorite part of the day might be a cappella club, which meets before school on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. This means I have to drive her on those mornings, which complicates my bike commute to work.

There's something that just seems cosmically backwards about that. Back in the old days, I rode my bike to middle school and my dad drove to work. Grace, it's fair to say, for all her virtues, is not really given to aerobic activity. And even if she were, we live 4 miles from the school (4.5 miles via bike paths). I'm perfectly content with Silver Spring International Middle School, but I have no idea why we're assigned to it. Three middle schools are closer, and one of them (Sligo) would be a really easy bike ride.

I am not inclined to draw a line between rising childhood (and adult) obesity rates and the fact that hardly anyone rides a bike to school anymore. (I actually doubt the two things are related at all.) But in a school district that probably does make such a connection and purports to care about carbon footprints you'd think they'd figure out how to draw more sensible boundaries.

Sophie continues to get along okay in high school. The two classes that appear to present the greatest challenge to her are also the two that are taught by long-term subs: her government class and her French class. To date, we have no concrete evidence that Sophie's French teacher speaks (or even understands) English. She believes she may be the only non-native speaker in the class—or at least the only one whose parents are not native French speakers—and doesn't really understand anything. I'm as big a Francophile as anyone, but I really don't understand why my children don't just study Spanish.

In addition to being the fall play (I can't remember what it's called) Sophie is also involved with the "[Cappies](#)." This means that she attends a half-dozen or so other high school productions, writes reviews about them, and helps determine whether to nominate them for awards. She attended a two-hour training early this month during which she learned all the do's (and the much larger number of don'ts) associated with this.

Earlier this month, a couple of friendly fellow swim team dads invited me to join them for the Sea Gull



Above: Crystal's bike at Mount Vernon

Below: Abby and Sophie in costume at the stake Halloween dance. (They are dressed as two brothers from their seminary class.)



Century bike ride on Maryland's Eastern Shore. The 102-mile loop started and ended at Salisbury University and was scenic in the way the Eastern Shore is scenic—long, flat stretches of nothing punctuated by the occasional quaint, small town and several lingering “Make America Great Again” signs. (Crossing the Bay Bridge really transports you to a different world.) One of the ride's four pit stops was at Assateague Island National Seashore—a place known primarily for the many wild horses and ponies that inhabit it. Certain people I live with have been angling to visit this place for many years, and now, unfortunately, I'm the only one who's been there.

There's nothing wrong with Assateague. It's just that the descriptions of it conjure romantic images of majestic animals roaming the seashore, like something out of the *The Black Stallion*. But at the end of the day, it's just a bunch of stupid horses wandering around eating people's garbage. I've seen it now. I had a good time on the ride though, and I'm happy the guys invited me.

Crystal is generally more given to these types of organized rides than I am. Unfortunately, it was not until after she had already registered (and paid) for the Sea Gull Century that she realized she had a seminary teacher in-service meeting that morning. I'm pretty sure I would have blown off the meeting, but not Crystal. She went to the in-service and then, about a week later, made up for missing the Century by biking from home to Mount Vernon and back (a 68-mile round trip) on her own. There were no official rest areas on her route but I think she may have stopped a few times. Still, she's pretty spry for an old gal of 47.

She's been 47 for a little less than a week now. She marked the occasion by making her own birthday cake. She has very high standards for birthday cakes and does not trust anything that might be made (or purchased) by anyone currently living in our house. It was a pretty good cake. But since we're all fans of The Great British Baking Show now, the girls and I put on our best Paul Hollywood and Mary Berry accents and critiqued the “sponge,” the evenness of the layers, and the overall presentation. I'm pretty sure Crystal appreciated our input.

Lucy turned 18 this month, which, I suppose, technically means she doesn't have to live with us anymore. But we are happy she's around. She



Grace performs “Not About Angels” at the Silver Spring International Middle School coffee house—27 Oct 2017

Video [here](#)

continues to derive a surprisingly amount of pleasure from puns, silly internet memes, singing, playing her ukulele, and transcribing video game music. She also continues to ride the bus to Montgomery College in Takoma Park each day. My parents have sometimes said of my brother Peter (who has Down Syndrome) that he has taught them things they never knew they wanted to learn. Though Lucy's afflictions are different, I think I can say much the same of her. She continues to make me a better person than I otherwise would be.

Once of several Lucys for whom Lucy Willis is a namesake is my great-aunt Lucy Grant Cannon Dutson Taylor, who passed away this week at 95. Her first three names, given at birth, reflect her (and our) genealogy. Her last two names reflect the two husbands she outlived. She was a lovely woman in every respect. I imagine my younger brothers share my fond memories of the summer nights we spent in her basement as boys. Because most of my memories of her are from that stage of my life, I still associate her primarily with the organ and pool table in her house, both of which she let me play with, and both of which brought me great delight.

I am grateful for her example of goodness and for yours.
Love, Tim