

# THE FAMLET

## MONTHLY



### Dear Family,

Like many people, I don't have a very good sense of when or how I will die. But in a hypothetical futures betting market on my personal demise, I imagine the shortest odds would be assigned to two proximate causes: 1) attempting to navigate rush-hour traffic on my bicycle, and 2) failure to visit a physician upon discovering early-stage symptoms of a fatal condition that could have been treated if caught early.

Even though I do the first thing many times each week, I suspect the second thing is far more likely to kill me.

Upon reflection, my reasons for never going to the doctor are probably more complicated than I realize. But I think they boil down primarily to some combination of laziness and embarrassment. I don't know what I can do about the first problem, but I'm hoping that writing and publishing this month's letter will help me in some measure with the second.

For years I have lived with persistent itchiness on various parts of my body, including my hand, my foot, and a more embarrassing region whose technical name I only recently learned to be my *superior gluteal cleft*. Less sophisticated people (like me) know it better as "the top of my butt crack."

For years Crystal has told me that I ought to visit a dermatologist. And for years I have agreed with her. But I never go, in part because, in addition to being lazy, I'm too embarrassed to pull down my pants in



*Above: Hannah and Lucy eat chicken on the day before Thanksgiving.*

*Below: Lucy, Sophie and Grace after seeing Annie at the Olney Theater*



front of a stranger and talk about the dry, itchy patch at the top of my butt crack.

What may have ultimately gotten me to go are two small blemishes on my face that look kind of like blackheads but aren't. They reminded me of my sister-in-law Andra's recent Facebook post about a similar-sounding blemish on her face that turned out to be carcinoma and had to be surgically removed. I did not relish the thought of going through that, but I still feel too young to die, and so I bit the bullet and made an appointment with the dermatologist. The stated purpose of my visit was to examine my two facial blemishes, but then I pulled the old "hey, since I'm here anyway, maybe you could also take a look at my hand, my foot...and, um, this is kind of embarrassing...my butt crack?"

I'll bet he gets that all the time.

He diagnosed my facial blemishes as small moles (he used a more technical term that I didn't write down and don't remember) and told me not to worry about them. He diagnosed my three other problem areas as three different things (I don't remember any of the words he used) and prescribed three different ointments—one for my hand, one for my foot, and one for what the doctor—a man who I would guess is 10 years younger than I—referred to only as my "bottom."

*My bottom?* That *can't* be the technical term. Children and elderly people have *bottoms*. There are at least a dozen other terms I might have used to identify that part of my own body before landing on *bottom*. Fortunately, the labels of the three prescribed ointments, which all look pretty much the same, each contain instructions on where to put them. One says "hand," one says "foot," and the third says "superior gluteal cleft," which is not nearly as fun to say as "butt crack" but is somewhat less embarrassing to talk about when I encounter a problem down there. You'll be happy to learn that all three ointments seem to be working.

As for the *other* way I might die, I was saddened last week when a United States Park Police officer shouted at me to get off the road.

My typical 14.4-mile bike ride to work takes me through four different legal jurisdictions: 1) Montgomery County, Maryland, 2) Washington, D.C., 3) Rock Creek Park (which is in D.C. but governed by the National Park Service and patrolled by the U.S. Park



*Above: Sophie after her 'Picnic' performance*

*Below: 'Sorry Sophie' Playbill shout-out*



*Five Brothers on Thanksgiving*

Police), and 4) Arlington, Virginia. While I am not a lawyer, I have invested a fair amount of time in familiarizing myself with the law as it pertains to bicycling in all four of these places. I won't bore you by citing statutes (unless you want me to) but suffice it to say that the only one of these jurisdictions that forbids riding on the road in the presence of a bike lane/path is Maryland. (I happen to disagree with that statute, but the law's the law, and incidentally, if you're inclined to become irritated by scofflaw cyclists, may I humbly suggest [this classic blog post](#).)

At the time the police officer shouted at me, I was legally riding my bike on Rock Creek Parkway, and he was riding a motorcycle on the bike path (which would be illegal if he weren't a police officer). Separating us was a large wooden barrier that would have made it impractical for me to comply with his order had I been inclined to do so, which I wasn't. And so I ignored him and nothing else came of the encounter. Part of me was hoping he would stop and cite me. I spent the rest of my ride to work rehearsing in my mind what I would have said to him. In my imagination, I would have calmly cited 36 CFR § 4.30, which permits bicycles on any road governed by the National Park Service that is otherwise open for motor vehicle use by the general public unless a sign is posted prohibiting bikes. (No such prohibition exists on any road in Rock Creek Park.) The duly chastened police officer would have then begged my pardon and bowed his head as I pedaled away triumphant in my rightness.

It's perhaps unlikely that the real-life encounter would have gone exactly that smoothly, and so I suppose I should just be happy he didn't stop me.

Speaking of bikes, the girls recently got me to finish season 2 of *Stranger Things*. The story is moderately compelling, but I think it's the eighties-ness of it that I find most appealing. I was a year or two younger than those boys at the time the series is set. I can relate to their socially awkwardness and, like them, I rode my bike almost everywhere—to school, to deliver newspapers, to the pool, to friends' houses, to piano lessons, to soccer practice—almost everywhere. It seems like only kids rode bikes back then—I only occasionally saw an adult riding one. Now it seems completely reversed, and I wonder why that is. My main beef with the show is the bikes themselves. Those are totally '70s bikes. No one I knew still had a banana seat in the '80s. We were all riding either old-school



*Above: 17 Thanksgiving pies*

*Below: Sophie (at piano) and 3 cousins provide post-Thanksgiving-dinner music*



*Cousins gather for the now-traditional, morning-after-Thanksgiving temple trip.*

ten-speeds or BMX dirt bikes (as you may recall from [this iconic 1982 scene](#)).

Sophie's most recent foray into drama took her even further back in time than *Stranger Things*—to the 1950s during which the William Inge play *Picnic* is set. Before this month I had heard of neither the play nor the playwright, and by this time next month, I likely will have forgotten both. It seemed like one of those plays that was supposed to mean something, but if it did, the meaning was completely lost on me.

Sophie was the understudy for the role of Flo Owens, and I thought she did a good job. I am not discerning enough to recognize the difference between good acting and *really* good acting. But I can usually spot *bad* acting, and I felt like Sophie's performance was definitely not bad. As the understudy, she got to perform in the free "community" performance on the Wednesday night before the show's official three-night run. I may have gotten a different impression of the show had I seen it performed by the non-understudies, but I doubt it. It's a pretty dumb play.

But I'm proud of Sophie. I was surprised to read bios and shout-outs in the Playbill that included the phrase, "Sorry, Sophie." When I asked Sophie what that was about, she explained that everyone in the production got in the habit of saying "Sorry, Sophie" whenever anyone swore (which I guess happens a lot in high school). Knowing Sophie as I do, this does not surprise me at all. It might not surprise you to learn that no one has ever said "Sorry, Tim" after uttering a profanity-laced tirade. Sophie probably takes umbrage to my liberal use of terms like *butt crack*. Sorry, Sophie.

Thanksgiving brought at least a half-dozen minivans to Grandma's driveway. I lost count of how many people crammed into the house (39 maybe—it's hard to say—I interacted meaningfully with fewer than 10). The affair featured four tables, multiple turkeys, and at least 17 pies. I did precisely none of the work and am thankful for those who did.

Among those in attendance was Hannah, who flew in Tuesday and returns to Provo today. She seems to be handling the first semester of her nursing program well. She brought her stethoscope and sphygmomanometer with her and has been practicing giving all of us physicals. She has diagnosed me as mildly hypertensive, which might be true, but it's hard to say for sure since she may have done it wrong and,



*Above: I get high-fives from Hannah and Crystal (who finished 20 minutes before me) at the end of yesterday's Turkey Burnoff*

*Below: Grace (Red Riding Hood) and Lucy (Doctor Who) on Halloween*



at any rate, I'm fairly certain that the act of having my blood pressure taken causes it to rise. I am also highly unlikely to do anything about it (see above).

Friday morning brought the now-traditional trip to the temple where ten (I think) cousins performed proxy baptisms, including several for some of Andra's Dutch ancestors whose names I'm pretty sure even Dutch people don't know how to pronounce. Presumably they still counted. Time with family in the temple reminded me of the most important things I have to be thankful for. These include covenants that bind me, in one way or another, to all of you.