

THE FAMLET MONTHLY



Dear Family,

“Star Wars Day” (May the Fourth be with you) is not an actual holiday, but the date is looming large for a couple of self-described nerds who rolled into town four days ago in anticipation of their forthcoming nuptials in Philadelphia on Friday. They spent Thursday morning driving to York, Pa., to pick up a marriage license, and it’s looking more and more like they’re actually going to go through with this.

The closure of the Washington D.C. Temple until 2020 makes Philadelphia our nearest option. Devoid of any historical context, this feels like an inconvenience. Sometimes I need to remind myself that when Hannah’s paternal grandparents met in D.C. in the late 1960s (several years before our temple was built) their nearest options were temples in Utah. Today, three dozen temples are closer to us than any in Utah are.

Marrying in a temple is important to Hannah and JT, as it was to many of their progenitors, for reasons that have nothing to do with tradition or aesthetics, and everything to do with unique covenants and promises that cannot be made in any other place. The ceremony that will seal them to one another and to their posterity for eternity consists of ordinary English words (and some less common ones) woven into phrases and sentences that are so special to us that we do not speak them to each other unless we are inside a temple. The pleasant thought of hearing them spoken on Friday is almost enough to get me past the prospect of the 14-hour photo shoot outside that will inevitably



Hannah and JT — 9 days before Star Wars Day.

follow. It's unlikely that any photos will be taken of the ceremony, but a photograph of the room where it will happen can be found [here](#) (8th photo from the top).

For reasons that have everything to do with tradition and aesthetics, the wedding will be followed by two receptions—one in Silver Spring this Saturday and another in Williamsburg the following Thursday. I don't know the specifics of the Williamsburg reception because, like some of you, I received a wedding announcement that cleverly explained how to purchase gifts but did not invite me to a reception. I've been told this was an oversight and I have to go anyway. We've attempted to distribute the reception info in various ways, but if we've missed you, please get in touch with us and we'll pass along the details. (If any of my other daughters choose to get married, I've decided I will take over the wedding announcements—unless they elope, which would also be fine.)

Hannah's Silver Spring reception will be held in a large room at church whose official designation is the "cultural center," though I've never in my life heard anyone call it that. Some church leaders and others of our parents' generation refer to it as the "cultural hall." Everyone else calls it what it is—"the gym." Pinterest is loaded with creative ideas for transforming Mormon meetinghouse "cultural centers" into elegant reception halls—camouflaging the basketball hoops, covering the floors, and installing ersatz ceilings of draped fabric. We won't go that far, and those who attend Hannah's reception will not be misled into thinking that they are standing on anything other than a very nice basketball court (inside a 1960s-era white-brick stake center that, notwithstanding the matching steeple in front, oddly resembles a warehouse from the outside) but I'm sure it will be lovely.

We have figured out the catering. Notwithstanding the many excellent, non-traditional suggestions we received in response to [last month's letter](#), I'm told we have pulled some Mormon mafia connections and hired the woman who used to run the temple cafeteria (presumably back in the old days, before the kitchen was replaced by vending machines). I don't know whether this is the same woman at the temple who, after serving Dad chicken Marsala, winked and said, "You know what's in that, don't you?" but I certainly hope it is.

Speaking of oversights, I failed to mention in last month's letter that Lucy, whose various diagnoses



Above: Lucy with her grandparents on Easter morning, a few moments after receiving her patriarchal blessing.

Below: Lucy between her parents and the Seneca Maryland Stake patriarch — same place.



include agoraphobia and who enjoys few things less than speaking to strangers, gave a talk in front of a bunch of people she did not know at the baptismal service of a friend from high school. I am told that the friend encountered a couple of missionaries and approached them to ask whether they knew Lucy Willis. This apparently led to several more questions, which subsequently led to the friend joining the Church. Lucy did not know anyone else at the baptism because, although her friend lives in our ward, she was being baptized into the Strathmore Young Single Adult Ward, which meets in the Chevy Chase meetinghouse (where Aunt Coco also goes to church, I think).

Lucy continues to attend our ward, where she has been serving as a Primary teacher (Sunbeams, I think), though she finds this overwhelming. People often refer to wards like ours as “family wards.” It could be that this annoys me as much as the practice of referring to men as “the priesthood” [annoys President Oaks](#), but I don’t know. It’s possible that the term *family ward* (which is not in any handbook) irritates me more. If you find the official term—*conventional ward*—too stodgy, I will also accept “ward” or “real ward,” though I can see why some might bristle at that.

Lucy and her friend, despite attending different wards, have begun attending Institute together on Tuesday nights and seem to be happy there. Crystal and the friend’s mom take turns giving them rides. I am always impressed by parents not of our faith who support their Mormon children, and I sometimes wonder if I would be equally supportive of my daughters if they went off and joined some strange religion. Jerk that I am, I probably wouldn’t be, though I think I’ve been reasonably supportive of Lucy’s veganism, which is sort of like a religion.

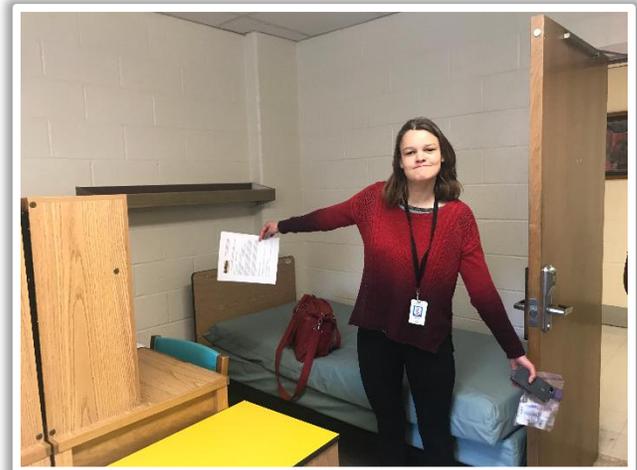
I honestly didn’t believe Lucy’s vegan lifestyle would last more than a week. Now more than two months into it, the two of us had lunch together at Sweetgreen a couple of weeks ago. (My official ranking of local salad places, since I’m sure you’re wondering, is: 1) Chop’t, 2) Sweetgreen, 3) Sweet Leaf—and there’s nothing I like at Sweet Leaf.) I’ve learned through experimentation that I can tolerate kale if it’s chopped finely, mixed in with enough edible stuff, and drowned in the right salad dressing. When they ask whether I want “light, medium, or heavy” dressing, I usually say “extra” and see what happens. It never looks like it’s going to be enough, but it usually works out okay.



Lucy and I cross the finish line together at Lucy’s first 5K.



Sophie – Age 16.



Lucy discovers her dorm room at the Workforce and Technology Center in Baltimore.

*Stake presidency families with Elder Gerrit W. Gong
– 15 Apr 2018.*



Lucy has also taken up running. She finished her first 5K race last Saturday—the first time she’d ever run that far without walking. I am proud of her.

Lucy received her patriarchal blessing from Grandpa on Easter morning. (In an unintended bit of symmetry, Sophie received hers on Christmas Eve last year and Hannah received hers on Palm Sunday, six years to the day before Lucy’s—all in the same chair.) It was a touching experience.

I believe Lucy derived a measure of peace from reading her blessing as she prepared to spend this past week at the State of Maryland’s [Workforce & Technology Center](#) in Baltimore to undergo a series of tests designed to assess the aptitude of people with disabilities for various types of employment. Her dorm was a painful reminder of various facilities where she has been confined over the years, but she got through it. She appreciated that this place differed from those in that she was not searched upon entry and was free to enter and leave as she pleased. (Though, in light of the neighborhood, it was suggested she not venture out alone. This limited her jogging to a treadmill, which, as anyone can tell you, is abject torture.)

She may return there in June for a 10-week training program to be a veterinarian’s assistant. To my knowledge, we will not be billed for any of this, and I have now officially foregone any right to complain about no longer being able to deduct all of my Maryland taxes from my federal taxable income.

We haven’t seen much of Sophie, who turned 16 earlier this month. It feels like she’s spent every waking hour at the school rehearsing for four performances of *A 16 Bar Cut: The History of American Musical Theater*. (This is not the Plan B show I thought they were rehearsing when I wrote [last month’s letter](#). This show was Plan C, and the nine-member cast prepared it in just five weeks.) Sophie did a lovely job in a number of scenes but really brought the place down with her mocking synopses of *Miss Saigon* and *Les Misérables*, the latter of which featured a fabulously over-dramatic portrayal of Eponine’s death that had Sophie singing “A Little Fall of Rain” as she crawled across the stage. I can’t imagine I would have enjoyed the Plan A or Plan B shows as much as I enjoyed this one.

Finally, from the annals of “I hope you girls appreciate what’s happening right now, because it’ll probably never happen again,” an unusual confluence of events

resulted in our family’s spending 20 minutes with an apostle—Elder Gerrit W. Gong—two Sundays ago.

It’s probably not the most appropriate comparison to ever cross my mind, but as Elder Gong sat down in the high council room across from Lucy, Sophie, and Grace, it reminded me of how good the princesses at Disney World are at making whatever little girl happens to be in front of them feel valuable and loved. Elder Gong was the same way, and there was nothing artificial about it. They appeared to have his undivided attention, and he genuinely cared about what they were up to. It was pretty neat to see. (In response to a question Crystal asked, he also provided some off-the-record counsel about the applicability to seminary teachers of the Church’s policy requiring the presence of two responsible adults in classrooms with children or youth, but I probably shouldn’t put that on the internet.)

Having seen the cross-stitch four-generation charts on the wall in Mom and Dad’s family room, our stake president knows something of our genealogy, and he shared a little of it with Elder Gong. Elder Gong’s mind must have a pretty fast processor, because he immediately turned to me and said, “Then you must be related to Truman Madsen. Did you know him?” I replied that Truman was my grandmother’s first cousin and that I’d met him, but that Crystal knew him better since she had taken a philosophy course from him at BYU. Elder Gong then told the girls a remarkable story about Truman Madsen, Spencer W. Kimball, and the Washington Temple.

The experience was further evidence that apostles tend to have big brains (Elder Gong was a Rhodes Scholar) and even bigger hearts. I honestly have no idea how they do what they do, but I’m grateful they choose to do it.

I am likewise grateful for you. Love, Tim