

the Famlet monthly

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Dear Family,

Hannah turned 16 a few weeks ago. I love her, and if I could change anything about her, I wouldn't.

On a related note, Hannah and I spent four hours on Friday at the MVA.

MVA stands for "Motor Vehicle Administration." It's what every other place I've ever been calls the DMV. But here in Maryland we like to give things special, different names. You may, for example, be familiar with ESL (English as a Second Language). In Maryland, however, it's ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages). Likewise, you may have heard of *Communists*. We have quite a few of those here in Maryland, but we call them *Progressives*. Many of them are very nice, otherwise intelligent people.

And some of them work at the MVA. Hannah and I spent most of Friday there, waiting in at least four separate queues, so she could get her "Learner's Permit." (I'm pretty sure this is what other jurisdictions call it, too.) If all goes according to plan, she will be eligible for a provisional license in 9 months and a "full" license when she turns 18.

This differs somewhat from the experience of Hannah's mother who obtained her Idaho driver's license at age 14. Reasonable people can debate the virtues of licensing drivers that young, whether graduated licensing programs make sense, and how young is too young. But, it's a lot easier just to rely on anecdotes to make fun of people. Take Crystal, who, earlier this year while driving her mother to the airport, backed our van into our next-door neighbor's parked BMW. (For what it's worth, Crystal's mother—who also learned to drive in Idaho—felt that the *parked* car was principally at fault for this collision.) I wouldn't go so far as to suggest that obtaining one's driver's license at a very young age increases the likelihood of ingraining bad habits that beget a lifetime of inferior driving. No, I would never suggest anything like that.

Not in a hundred years.

I'm not sure which of us will bear the primary responsibility for teaching Hannah how to drive. Her mother's temperament is almost certainly better suited to it.

And then there's the fact that Crystal's the only one of us who's reliably in town. I wrote last month's letter from suburban Denver. (Lone Tree, Colorado, to be precise—elevation: 5,960 feet, according to my Garmin wristwatch. My first real experience running at altitude presented some challenges but was a day at the beach compared to running in hot humidity at sea level.) But I've spent most of the past month in suburban Dallas. (Lewisville, Texas, to be precise—elevation: 450 feet, according to my watch. Hillier than I expected, but flatter than where we live. The running would be a breeze if not for the fact that everything—roads, bike paths, *everything*—is paved in concrete. Seriously, *concrete*. I guess I haven't come across as many potholes and chopped up surfaces there as here in asphalt-land, but it's a real drag to run on.) Anyway, with the exception of this past holiday week, I've spent more December weeknights in Texas than at home. And it looks like I'll be

heading back for a good chunk of January as well. It isn't my favorite thing to do, but I'm grateful for the work.

The recent spike in business travel would complicate matters further if I were still the bishop of the White Oak Ward. But, as all of Crystal's Facebook friends have known for nearly a month, I'm not anymore. Six and a half years goes pretty fast when you look back at it. I hadn't even heard of Facebook when I became bishop in May of 2006. Chances are, you hadn't either. Nobody was on Twitter or had an iPhone. They didn't exist. Hardly anyone had heard of Barack Obama. My Bishop's Certificate bears the signatures of three men: Gordon B. Hinckley, Thomas S. Monson, and James E. Faust. Only one of them is still signing. And he's pretty old.

(I'm still not on Facebook, by the way. I blame Facebook for most, if not all, of society's ills. No one could possibly have cheered the colossal failure of its IPO more loudly than I did. And as with *everything* else, I will continue to mock and denounce it right up until the moment that I embrace it—which, for all I know, could happen tomorrow. Stay tuned.)

It's been a very good six and a half years. Good for me, good for Crystal, and good for the girls. (I'm reasonably certain they agree.) It's a wonderful calling. I sort of understand why some people express their condolences to new bishops, but the condolence-offerers are almost never former bishops. It's difficult to understand how hard the job can be until you've had it, but I think it might be impossible to understand how great it is—how high the highs can be—until you've had that front-row seat to so many good choices made by so many good people whose lives are happier as a result and who want you to share in the credit, even though you know you don't deserve any of it.

I never really figured out how to do welfare right. I'm still haunted by the juxtaposition of one family sharing with me that they've forgone having internet service in their house so that they can afford to pay a more generous fast offering with another family requesting that the ward provide Christmas presents for their children—the request emailed to the Relief Society president from the needy mother's new iPhone 5.

Not my problem anymore. But I'm sure going to miss it.

I'm on the high council now, advising the stake young men and young women presidencies and overseeing the stake seminary program. I'm not sure what all that means yet, but for a 40-year-old former seminary teacher and retired bishop who's already missing the connection with his ward's youth, it seems like the right fit.

The new bishopric finally released Crystal from the Primary presidency, where she'd served for many years under multiple presidents, and called her to be the Gospel Doctrine teacher. I've very much enjoyed her first two lessons and am looking forward to listening to her take us through next year's course of study.

Lucy was in a play this month. [Read all about it in the Luce-Leaf.](#)

Happy New Year.

Love,

Tim, *et al*



Sophie (left) and friends at the school choral concert (which I missed because I was in Dallas).



Right: Grace exults in the sock monkey Hannah made her for Christmas. Hannah got a Kindle Fire.



Lucy's lion mane from her performance in "Say Goodbye, Toto." (Read the Luce-Leaf.)

