

the Famlet monthly

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Dear Family,

I feel fortunate that I am probably unable to remember every stupid thing I have ever said. I don't think I'm unusual in that the dumb things I've said—the ones I do remember—haunt me, and the haunting does not seem to fade with time.

One of the reasons triathlon appeals to me is its inherent solitary nature. Sometimes, when people learn that Crystal and I are doing the same triathlon, they ask whether we are running it "together." Anybody who knows anything about triathlon recognizes this as an absurd question. For one thing, triathlons often begin in waves. With a few exceptions, the wave to which you are assigned is a function of your age and gender. Crystal and I are never in the same wave, and, unlike in marathons, triathlon waves are actually enforced.

For another thing, I don't know how you're supposed to do a long, open-water swim "with" somebody, when you're already out there with a thousand other people, just trying to get through it without getting kicked in the head or having your goggles ripped off your face by another swimmer.

For another thing, even if we managed to transition from the swim to the bike together, you're not really allowed to ride close to another cyclist. Drafting is illegal in most triathlons, and hanging out alongside another rider constitutes "blocking." Both things will get you a time penalty (if they catch you—and if you do it long enough, they will).

I am not aware of any rule against running with another racer, but by that point I typically have no interest in interacting with another person—other than perhaps the complete stranger who is handing out mysterious-looking white pills at the aid station.

"It's salt. Take one," says the smiling woman you've never seen before, pressing the mysterious capsule into your hand.

"Okay," you reply. And you eat it. Because what's the worst that could happen? You might drop dead, but it's possible that was going to happen anyway.

And so, aside from the strangers along the way occasionally handing me things to ingest, triathlon training and racing is many hours of sheer isolation. Just me and my thoughts. (Earphones, by the way, strictly, *strictly* prohibited in triathlon—unlike marathons, where they're kinda-sorta discouraged, but tons of runners wear them anyway and no one cares.) Triathlon is just you having a very long conversation with you.

The intensity of the conversation tends to vary with the conditions. It was an unusually cold January. On one particularly balmy Saturday morning (21 degrees, 11 wind chill) my 13.2-mile training run took me mostly along Sligo Creek Parkway (I usually stick to the paved Sligo Creek *Trail*, but it was covered with snow and ice, and so I moved over to the road). My drink flasks froze shut; the drink inside became a Slurpee; the sweat inside my knit hat froze it solid—it was like wearing an igloo on my head; my ears and face went totally numb by mile 5—I was afraid I was getting frostbite (but didn't); and I almost got hit by about 15 different cars.

It made for a fun conversation with myself.

I enjoy all these conversations for the most part. They're sort of

like writing a letter to no one in particular. The topics are wide ranging and utterly random. But occasionally I dredge up a memory of something I've said (to another actual person) that is truly mortifying. I cringe and want nothing more than to be able to go back and un-say it. But, alas, I cannot. I can only continue swimming, biking, or running—and try to change the subject in my mind to something else.

Most of my memories of idiotic utterances are too embarrassing to share. One that's been harassing me recently is from over a decade ago. We were in the house of a family in the neighborhood—friends of ours from church. I noticed a wedding photo on the wall that I recognized as *their* wedding photo only because I could identify the husband. I don't recall precisely what I said, but it was something very close to, "That's you? (referring to the wife) Wow, I didn't recognize you; you used to be really attractive."

It was one of those times when I realized I was saying something horrific even as the words were coming out of my mouth, but it was too late. I tried to save it with some kind of lame joke. I don't remember what it was, but it couldn't have been any good. For over ten years, I've been trying to think of what I could have tacked on to that sentence that would have rendered it inoffensive. I don't think there is anything. The object of my derision was pretty gracious about the whole thing. (She didn't throw me out of her house.) They still live in the area, and every time I see her, I hope she's forgotten about it. But I'll never know because it's one of those things no one will ever bring up. Drives me crazy.

I mention this because this was the month of people saying things that may not have come out exactly as intended. Nothing as bad as my gaffes, but nonetheless worthy of memorialization.

Let's start with Crystal, who, on a 10-degree evening last week when the six of us were enjoying frozen yogurt at Sweet Frog, dispensed some motherly advice to her oldest daughter, who had noted that a nice boy in her class was a little funny looking. "You should not judge a boy by what he looks like in high school," Crystal said to Hannah. And I thought she would add some platitude about how it's what's on the inside that matters, blah, blah. But no, what she added was, "Have you seen your father's senior picture? When he graduated from high school, he looked like Sophie."

I'm not sure why Crystal chose to insult Sophie in that way. Perhaps it was because of what Sophie said to Hannah earlier in the month. Hannah had been asked to accompany the hymn during a church youth meeting. To this end, she had been diligently practicing "Called to Serve" (not the easiest hymn to play) for a significant amount of time each day, in the hope of getting through it during the meeting without too many screw-ups. Shortly before church, Hannah apologized to everyone, "I hope you haven't been too bored listening to me play this same song over and over."

Sophie replied, "It isn't boring. It sounds different every time you play it."

This was Sophie, and so it was meant in the nicest possible way. This was Sophie, who is beautiful even though she allegedly resembles her father. This was Sophie, perhaps the sweetest and most forgiving girl you'll ever meet, who won't hold a grudge against me for having written this. Hopefully you won't, either.

Love, Tim et al





With the girls outside the National Archives. We saw the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.
Perfect MLK Day activity. No lines.
(Never go in the summer—unless you like lines)

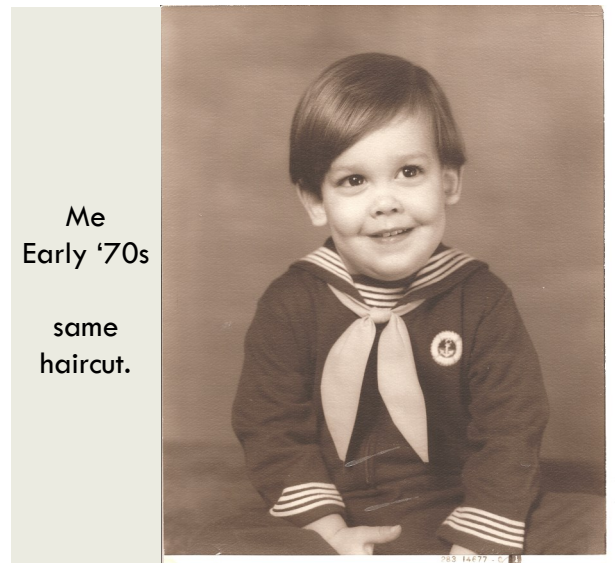


Sophie runs the New Year's Day 5K at Seneca Creek State Park



Me
12th Grade
(awesome '80s
background)

I don't know
that I see the
resemblance to
Sophie.



Me
Early '70s

same
haircut.