

the Famlet monthly

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Dear Family,

Among the duties of my current Church assignment is responsibility for the Washington DC Sign Language Branch. The branch is organized in our stake but draws members from an immense area that covers parts of four different *missions*.

Because they are so far-flung, it is difficult to interview members of the branch at any time other than Sunday around the meeting block. And so I have attended the branch each of the past three Sundays interviewing Melchizedek Priesthood candidates and installing a new branch presidency. All of my interviews begin the same way. I ask the person whether he can hear me, whether he can read my lips, or whether we need to find an interpreter. And while I've needed an interpreter a couple of times (which is an interesting enough way to have a personal conversation with somebody) most people tell me they can understand me fine *because I don't speak with an accent*.

It never would have occurred to me that my accent would have any impact on a deaf person's ability to understand me.

I don't believe that I speak with an accent that can be characterized as anything other than generically "American." Sometimes, when people learn where I grew up, they express surprise that I do not have a New Jersey accent. In response I typically explain that I'm not from *that* part of New Jersey and that I've lived in Maryland for 60 percent of my life. I've thought about just not mentioning that I'm from New Jersey when they ask where I'm from. But if I were to do that, I'd feel like I was denying part of my heritage. It would also nullify my principal justification for acting like a jackass when I do.

Anyway, I've really come to love the Deaf Branch. You know how missionaries develop an almost cheesy affinity for the people where they serve? I'm starting to feel like that might be where I'm headed. Have you ever witnessed a priesthood ordination in sign language? Ask me about it sometime; it's really quite touching. Maybe it's just knowing I'm being released in a week that's causing me to feel emotional about all this, but they really are good folks.

Unlike me, Crystal, who has only lived in Maryland for 43 percent of her life, learned this month she apparently *does* have an accent. She learned this waiting in line for a visitor badge at Children's National Medical Center. (One of our ward's young women was hospitalized there.) She was saying something to Grace when the woman ahead of them in line turned around and asked if she was from Australia. When Crystal replied that she had lived her entire life in the U.S., the woman *behind* her in line said, "No, you *definitely* have an accent." Crystal shrugged and said she had grown up in Idaho, and the two women agreed that that must be it. Grace said that she didn't know people from Idaho had accents, to which Crystal replied (loudly enough for all around to hear) that in Idaho, people from Idaho don't have accents, but apparently here they do. And I guess they sound Australian to some people.

[I've spent the last several minutes debating in my mind whether this next part is relevant. It may or may not be, but since I know you're wondering, I'll go ahead and tell you: Yes, both women were African-American. I hope I didn't just set us all back 25

years.]

Speaking of funny accents, Hannah attended both morning sessions of General Conference at the Conference Center. The rest of us followed the usual tradition of getting together at Grandma's house for the Sunday afternoon session and somehow squeezing in appropriate recognition of Lucy's birthday (which is always pre-empted by conference whenever her birthday falls on a week-end—Sophie, whose birthday falls during the first week of April, has the same problem). Conference at Grandma's house is fun, but cramming 20 people into the family room is not exactly a recipe for reverence or getting much out of the session. Invariably, someone (me, usually) starts a conversation that is tangentially related to conference, but not really. Take, for instance, the following (mostly) actual conversation:

SOMEONE: Do you think they put makeup on the male speakers?

SOMEONE ELSE: If so, they aren't doing a very good job.

SOMEONE ELSE: What did you think about the color scheme of the choir in the Saturday afternoon session?

SOMEONE ELSE: If they were trying to look like a giant gumball machine, then they totally nailed it.

SOMEONE ELSE: Hey, what language is he speaking?

SOMEONE ELSE: If you were actually listening, you would know it's...

I'm not suggesting we stop watching conference at Grandma's house, just that it's a good thing I listen to the podcast in my car.

(Speaking of podcasts, I'm now hooked on *Serial*, the *This American Life* spinoff. I'm afraid they are going to leave unresolved the question at the heart of the whole thing, which annoys me.)

We also learned during conference that Leyla (Grant and Jen's family's dog—and Ceres's sister) had been hospitalized with a mysterious ailment that, among other symptoms, rendered her unable to walk. This resulted in much prayer and concern in both our households. I was happy to learn that she is getting better, but I am embarrassed to admit that my first question was, "So what's all this going to cost?" The answer prompted me to purchase vet insurance for Ceres, who is now covered.

Crystal and I celebrated her birthday this weekend by participating together in Saturday's [Great Pumpkin Ride](#), a 68-mile bicycle tour of scenic Fauquier County, Va. The ride had four "rest areas," each stocked with pumpkin pie, pumpkin soup, pumpkin bread, pumpkin cookies, pumpkin seeds, hot cider, oreos, candy, and beer. I'm not sure whether we consumed or burned more calories.

Two weeks earlier, on a rainy Columbus Day, the two of us rode to Mount Vernon and back (a 66-mile round trip). Somehow the marriage survived both these rides, even though I've taken to sometimes calling Crystal "[Harriet](#)." I posted a picture from the Mount Vernon ride on my new Twitter account ([@timothywillis](#) — I have 12 followers, so there's plenty of room on the ground floor.

On the Saturday between the two rides, I ran the Baltimore Marathon. I missed my goal (for the fourth time) by 15 minutes but I was more than a half-hour faster than last year. So, there's that.

Thank you, Utah relatives, for taking such good care of my daughter.

Love, Tim *et al*





Grace at a DC United soccer game—RFK Stadium, Washington, DC.

[Transparency disclaimer: This photo is from July, but we also went to a game together last week and are going to a playoff game in two weeks.]

Grace is a huge DC United fan!

Also, RFK is a dump.

Grace's personal leaf pile





Lucy's 15th birthday
(She got Doctor Who pajamas.)



Fried Oreos and Fried Twinkies
Nature's Perfect Food!

I did not take these pictures (thank you, Internet!) but we did fry up some Oreos and Twinkies (and funnel cake) with our friends the Kempers this month.

We had spent the past several weeks watching all the Star Wars movies together. This event was in recognition of making it through all of them.

We ate this while playing Star Wars Trivial Pursuit—everybody against the Kempers' 13-year-old son.

We won (barely).