

the Famlet monthly

August 30, 2015

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Dear Family,

Before getting to this month's business, I wish to make a clarifying statement about something I wrote in last month's letter. Crystal took exception to it in part, I believe, because she interpreted it in a manner other than what I intended. I suppose it's possible that others did, too.

I was *not* arguing that sparsely populated areas are inferior to densely populated ones. Indeed, to argue that one kind of place is "better" than another is pointless, as all these things ultimately boil down to personal taste and preference.

All I was trying to say (clumsily, I'll admit) is that the kind of area to which one gravitates is a function of more variables than anyone truly understands and the various ways in which different people weight those variables, probably without realizing it. And in the final analysis, the *revealed preference* of most people, by definition, is to live in places where a lot of other people happen to live. It was nothing more than a simple tautological observation, not unlike the following:

You: Why is this room so crowded?

Me: Because it's a very popular room.

The tautology does not suggest anything about the quality of the room relative to other rooms; only that, for whatever complex combination of reasons, a lot of people have made a decision to be there as opposed to being someplace else.

That's it. End of analysis. If you happen to live in a place where not many other people have chosen to live, it does not necessarily follow that you live in a bad place. Because you live there, you probably view it as good. That is why you chose to live there, and that view is just as valid as anyone else's. Yours is a demonstrably less *preferred* place. But "preferred" does not mean the same thing as "better." (Exhibit A: Donald Trump's current polling figures; Exhibit B: The equally inexplicable popularity of kale.)

With that out of the way, I would like to share a few memories about my paternal grandparents, who have been dead since 1997 (Grandpa) and 2001 (Grandma), but whose legacy of largesse culminated to some degree this month.

It would be fair to say that I write this letter every month because of my Grandma Willis. This is explained in a text box somewhere on this page (it moves around) titled "About the Famlet." I wrote the contents of that text box when I migrated my monthly letter-writing habit to the web nearly a decade ago, and I don't think I have edited it since. The explanation makes passing reference to my grandparents' generosity (how they bankrolled, for example, half of my college tuition and one-third of my mission expenses). Left unsaid is how my grandparents' generosity was not limited to those few of us who were fortunate enough to finish our education and missions while Grandma and Grandpa were alive. Rather, their death triggered the funding of a trust that continued paying these expenses for *all* of their grandchildren. *All thirty-one of us.*

At some point earlier this year, after the youngest grandchild completed his undergraduate degree, the trustee liquidated

the remainder of the fund and distributed the proceeds in equal shares to the thirty-one of us. It is not a life-changing amount of money, but it is significant enough that I have stashed it in a separate account until I understand what impact it will have on my tax liability this year.

If that sounds like an unusual way to treat a cash windfall, well, that's just how my mind has been trained to work. And it works that way in no small part because of my grandparents.

My grandparents were never especially wealthy. Their lives, however, were a testament to gratitude, thrift, and generosity—that great triad of interdependent virtues that seem to be the gateway to all others. Grandma and Grandpa were the embodiment of them.

Their thrift was the stuff of legend and gave birth to my Aunt Rebecca's list of "Willis-isms" that has entertained generations of Willises at family reunions for years. Sadly, I did not inherit very many of the Willis-isms, but a little has rubbed off. To wit:

- The combined age of our two cars is 21 years, 221,000 miles.
- I have *never* in my life paid so much as a dime of credit card interest.
- Our only debt is our mortgage. I know exactly how many payments we have left, and if I were to suddenly come into enough money to pay it off tomorrow, that's the first thing I would do. (Please don't write to me explaining why that would not necessarily be the most efficient use of my capital. I understand that, and I understand why. I would pay off the mortgage anyway.)

I'm fairly certain I inherited this from my grandparents. And however comical their thrift could be, their gratitude and generosity was even more heartwarming and awe-inspiring. I continue to remember them as two of the kindest people I will ever know. They loved their family. They loved everyone.

My grandparents' tradition of biennial family reunions has carried to the next generation. This month, my parents' 23 descendants (plus our wives and Aunt Coco) gathered with them in one large oceanfront duplex in Ocean Isle Beach, N.C., to renew that tradition. Our first beach reunion featured, as you might expect, several hours on the beach each day, including ocean kayaking (which I enjoyed), paddleboarding (which you can now add to waterskiing and wakeboarding on the list of "watersports I can't do"), and general horseplay (at which I am a natural). Notwithstanding the spate of shark attacks in N.C. earlier in the season (including one at our beach)—a oft-rehearsed theme anytime any of us was in the water—our group had only one brief encounter with a small tiger shark (which I did not actually see). Everybody lived.

Yesterday, we dropped Hannah at the airport and sent her back to BYU, where she is settling in with roommates she had not met before yesterday but already likes. We are grateful to Aunt Rebecca and Uncle Gary for feeding her and getting her from the airport to Provo. On the night before her departure she met with our bishop and stake president to complete her missionary recommendation. I expect news of her call will be leaked via other means prior to my next letter.

Hope you are well. Love, Tim.



Willis Reunion 2015 — Ocean Isle Beach, North Carolina



Sophie, Abby, Anika, Crystal, Hannah, and Lucy after lunch at Big Mike's Soul Food in Myrtle Beach, S.C.
(I recommend the fried pork chops.)



Me, Hannah, Sophie, and Alex in front of perhaps the world's ugliest lighthouse in Oak Island, N.C.



Anika, Hannah, Abby, Sophie, Lucy, and Crystal on the Myrtle Beach boardwalk.



Lucy and cousin Clara



Grace



Dad and his sons:

Andrew, me, Matthew, Dad, Peter, Grant.

(If I were Grant I would want it pointed out that the beach slopes down to the ocean on our left—Grant, Andrew and I are all roughly the same height. Matt is just a tad shorter.)

Sophie and cousin Alex — Sunday morning.



CLICK THE IMAGE TO VIEW THE UNFORGETTABLE VIDEO of Uncle Pete dancing to “Runaway” — the showstopping finale of the family reunion talent show (aided by nieces Morgan and Abby). This video has already been shared by other via Facebook and other means, but I’m the guy who shot it (on my phone in case you can’t tell) and posted it to YouTube. No need to thank me.