

the Famlet monthly

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Dear Family,

Yesterday morning Crystal and I ventured over to the Chesapeake Bay (a 45-minute drive) so I could get in one last open-water swim before [Ironman Maryland](#) this Saturday.

Swimming in open water without a buddy is not something I feel comfortable doing, and so it was nice of Crystal to come. (Grace came, too, but she mostly stayed on the mysteriously orange beach of Sandy Point State Park reading *Tuck Everlasting* for her English class.) The water was warm for late September—too warm, really—and the wind was up. The resulting rough water and high (for the Bay) waves were hard to swim through and made it difficult to sight on anything. All I could see in front of me was the next wall of water. Consequently my buddy and I were frequently out of sight of one another, which frightened me. It took more than half an hour to swim a little less than a mile and the whole thing was really quite demoralizing. I can only hope that next Saturday's 2.4-mile swim in the ominously named Choptank River is smoother.

Lucy and Sophie did not come with us, opting instead to attend a "Study Jam" session at Northwood High School. They chose a Saturday homework activity at school over a morning at the beach. In case all the Doctor Who posters, Fullmetal Alchemist manga, and Steven Universe paraphernalia in my house didn't give it away, I live with a bunch of nerds. But, happily, they all seem to be settling well into their new schools.

Grace's first month at Silver Spring International Middle School has seen her join an after-school tennis club and a before-school a cappella club. The chorus teacher remembers Sophie fondly, which seems to be working in Grace's favor. With everyone else off to seminary by 5:45, I'm enjoying my time alone with Grace each morning. Aided by an alarm clock she now gets herself out of bed and dressed and occasionally remembers to brush her hair before joining me in the kitchen. We then follow a longstanding pattern established by Crystal: Grace and I make her breakfast and lunch, read a couple of pages in *The Book of Mormon*, and say a little prayer together. Sometimes she remembers to brush her teeth, and then she's out the door, and I watch her begin the half-mile walk up our street to the bus stop. She seems happy, which makes me happy.

Crystal typically gets home from seminary about 10 minutes after Grace leaves. The class she teaches includes a niece (Abby), a nephew (Alex), about 20 other kids, and Sophie. By all accounts it is going well.

Sophie seems to have enjoyed her first month of high school. She is a good-natured, adventurous child who exhibits no compunction about trying new things, even when the probability of success is low. She decided this month that she wanted to be in student government. And if she was going to do that, then she might as well be class president. And so she ran for class president. She didn't win, but of all the posters I saw at back-to-school night, I thought hers were the best. She also joined the JV field hockey team. She took up field hockey in August, two weeks before the start of school. And by virtue of those two weeks, she has been playing field hockey longer than almost everyone else on the team. They have yet to win a game or even to score a goal, losing their first five games by a combined score of 29-0.

Setbacks like these make Sophie sad for a little while, but they don't seem to weigh on her. By the next morning she's up and happy and ready for the next thing. Rather than quitting field hockey, she appears to be doubling down on it, and I'm tempted to think she might literally be indestructible. But really, I suspect she just possesses an unusually precocious understanding of things that matter and things that, in the grand scheme, aren't all that important. She's a good girl.

As is Lucy, who begins 12th grade attending four classes plus lunch at Northwood (she and Sophie often eat together) and then finishing the day at [RICA](#). She is now sleeping four nights a week (Monday thru Thursday) at RICA and the other three at home. See [last month's letter](#) for the story of how Lucy came to get transportation from RICA to Northwood each morning. Lucy's school therapist referred to this as "the miracle of the bus" during an ITP meeting earlier this month. Lucy's transition continues to go well and on schedule. The plan is to move to four nights at home in the near future and to full mainstreaming sometime in January. She really appears to be doing well, for which we are grateful.

Back-to-school nights predictably conflicted with one another and with a seminary in-service meeting. We covered as many of them as we could, but let's face it, beyond elementary school, back-to-school night is a waste of time. Apart from the math teacher who struggled to pronounce the word *quantitatively* as she read it from her PowerPoint slide and the English teacher whose concluding slide contained an egregious affect/effect error in bold typeface across the top, there was nothing especially bad about it. It was just five hours of meetings dispensing information that could have been communicated to me in a 2-page email. Which, I guess, makes back-to-school night like pretty much everything else in life.

Transfers are this week in the Arizona Phoenix Mission. Hannah has been in Cottonwood since April, and I get the sense she would be perfectly happy to finish her mission there. The genuine love and concern her letters express for so many different kinds of people there are unlike anything I think I've ever read. But I am confident she will find contentment in whatever transfers deal her. Don't look now, but her mission is half over.

We are looking forward to Grandma Carolyn's visit beginning this Wednesday. The stated purpose of her visit is to will me across the finish line at Ironman Maryland this Saturday. It amuses me that my mother-in-law is crossing the country to watch me do something that I don't believe my mother has any intention of crossing three counties to watch. My mother should not read anything into that. Ironman is my in-laws' province. I've lost track of how many of them have done Ironman Coeur d'Alene at least once. My stated excuse for not doing that race is that, like almost all Ironmans, it's on a Sunday, and Sunday races don't work for me. When Ironman Maryland launched a couple of years ago on a *Saturday*, I knew I was going to lose that excuse. It's unfortunate that it falls on General Conference Saturday. But, inexplicably, I've not been asked to speak, and I don't watch any other TV shows at the time they actually air (except the MacGyver reboot premiere last Friday) and so that's how I've rationalized it.

And so here I am—six days and 140.6 miles away from becoming an even more insufferable tool than I am today. My bib number is 1818. People who care will figure out how to track my progress (or lack of). The rest of you may now resume your normal lives.

Love, Tim.





Sophie conducts family home evening from the piano bench on the night before the first day of school.



Lucy (12th grade), Sophie (9th grade), and Grace (6th grade) on the first day of school.



Grace on the first morning of a cappella club.



Crystal and Me: Moments before yesterday's treacherous swim in the bay.



Hannah and somebody's dog in Cottonwood, Arizona.



Hannah and somebody's pig in Cottonwood, Arizona.