

the Famlet monthly

December 31, 2016

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Dear Family,

Many years ago Crystal gave me a very nice butter dish for Christmas. I was happy enough to receive it even though I had not asked for one, and it was eerily reminiscent of that time Homer Simpson gave Marge a bowling ball for her birthday—with holes drilled for his fingers and his name engraved on it (so she would know it was from him, he would explain). The butter dish has since evolved into a metaphor for any number of gifts Crystal and I have exchanged over the years that in theory benefit both of us but that the recipient perhaps did not know “we” wanted as much as the giver did.

[By the way, that’s back-to-back letters with references to episodes of *The Simpsons* from 20+ years ago. Mark it down. It might never happen again.]

This year’s butter dish gift was the bicycle trainer I gave to Crystal. I’ll include a picture in case you don’t know what that is, but it’s essentially a device you attach to your bike that enables you to ride it in the basement while watching Netflix. It’s not as much fun as riding outside, but for some reason, even though I rather enjoy running and swimming through the winter, I have a hard time taking my bike out in the cold, and I’m, er, I mean *Crystal* is, tired of losing bike fitness over the winter. Hence the trainer. My magnanimity knows no bounds.

Incidentally, Roland, your sister got me a new Cervélo triathlon bike for Christmas with the Di2 electronic gear shifters. No one but you (and perhaps your Mom) will care about this, but I wanted to let you know. I’m pretty excited about it.

Our favorite Christmas present of all, as you would expect, was the 60-minute FaceTime conversation with Hannah. She was sick when we spoke to her but nevertheless appeared and sounded content. Several of our neighborhood friends we Christmas caroled to expressed surprise at not seeing Hannah with us this year. I’ve concluded that what makes explaining missions to friends not of our faith so difficult is that there is simply nothing to compare it to. Everyone’s natural inclination is to frame it as some sort of extended university semester abroad program. That’s certainly the easiest and most comfortable way of moving the conversation along. But the problem with that analogy isn’t the sheer number of differences between the two things as much as it is the fact that the two experiences do not resemble one another in any meaningful way. I can’t believe it’s taken me this long to figure out that it is utterly impossible to explain why people go on missions without also explaining why we choose to believe the things we believe. If I were better at explaining *that* (and I’m not good at it) then I would probably be better at explaining why Hannah, with no particular expectation from her parents or anybody else, chose to do what she is doing, and why it is so important. It’s hard to believe it’s been a year since we [dropped her at the airport](#).

We were also excited to learn this month that my Aunt Rebecca and Uncle Gary Boren of Tooele, Utah, have been assigned as missionaries here, in the Washington D.C. North Mission. Our stake president, who knows Aunt Rebecca and whose wife was briefly her companion when all three of them were young missionaries in Spain several decades ago, will now attempt to persuade the mission president that the Silver Spring Maryland Stake needs the Borens more than the other four stakes in the mission do. Selfishly, I

hope he is successful.

I apologize if you didn’t get our Christmas card this year. It’s remarkable that anyone did, and if your address changed this year, then you probably didn’t. December is busy for everyone, and I’ll spare you the details of what made this one seem particularly hectic for us. We didn’t even get around to taking the picture until the afternoon of Saturday the 17th. We had just returned home from cousin Afton’s baptism, and so everyone was wearing nice clothes. Crystal photographed the girls in the yard while I found a suitable Snapfish template. Five minutes later she came into the house with four photos. I uploaded the best one next to a picture I really like of Hannah with someone’s dog in Arizona, hastily wrote a brief caption, asked Crystal to proof it, and ordered the cards. They arrived Tuesday, the 20th. I didn’t even look at them. During the hour between when I got home from work and Grace’s chorus concert, I ran the envelopes through the printer (using the same mail merge list as last year—sorry movers) and asked Grace to begin stamping and stuffing them. It was then that Grace noticed that I had gotten Lucy’s age wrong. (She’s 17, not 16. I *knew* that. Lucy seems okay with it.) Grace finished stuffing in the car the following morning as I was driving her to her 7:15 a cappella club, and I dropped them in the mailbox on the way home. Done and done. I’m including a scan of the card alongside this month’s letter. I’ve officially lost track of why exactly we do this every year, but here you go. We appreciate *your* cards.

Grace’s concert went well. She did a nice job with her brief solo, and I was the piano accompanist for her chorus and two others, which I’ve been doing at this school off and on since Hannah was in 6th grade. I got to learn about a dozen new songs this year, including a bonus second Hanukkah song that somehow escaped the original pile of music provided to me and that I therefore had the privilege of learning in about five minutes. Fortunately, I like Hanukkah songs—a categorical assertion made possible by the fact that they all sound exactly alike: oom-pah-oom-pah in the left hand, eighth notes in the right hand, and a minor key. If you’ve spent any time in an LDS Primary during the past quarter century and are familiar with the children’s song, “Follow the Prophet,” it’s basically a rip-off of every Hanukkah tune I’ve ever played. Anyway, they’re great songs, and I certainly understand the importance of giving equal time to counterbalance all the other religiously charged music about sleigh bells, sleigh rides, mistletoe, reindeer, and snowmen that dominated the rest of the program.

Grace’s singing (she *loves* to sing and does so constantly) has been complicated somewhat by this month’s foray into orthodontia. She now has one of those medieval crank expander devices across the roof of her mouth as well as headgear, which, mercifully, she only has to wear at night. She’s taking it well, and I am excited at the prospect of completing our fourth and (hopefully) final \$7,000 relationship with the orthodontist.

December also brought the start of the high school swim season for Sophie. In her first real meet, Sophie swam the 100 back and the butterfly leg of the medley relay. Upon noticing that her school’s dive team lacked a full complement of divers, she went ahead and joined that team, too. She did four dives at the first meet, including at least one she’d never tried before. This is how Sophie rolls.

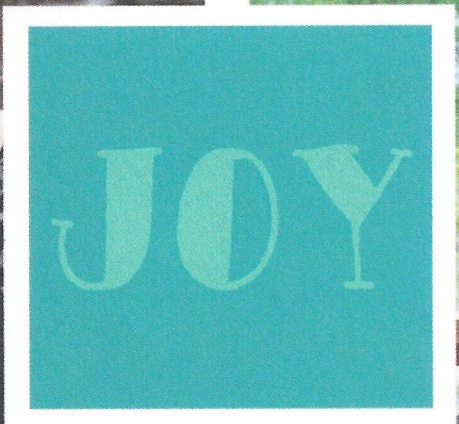
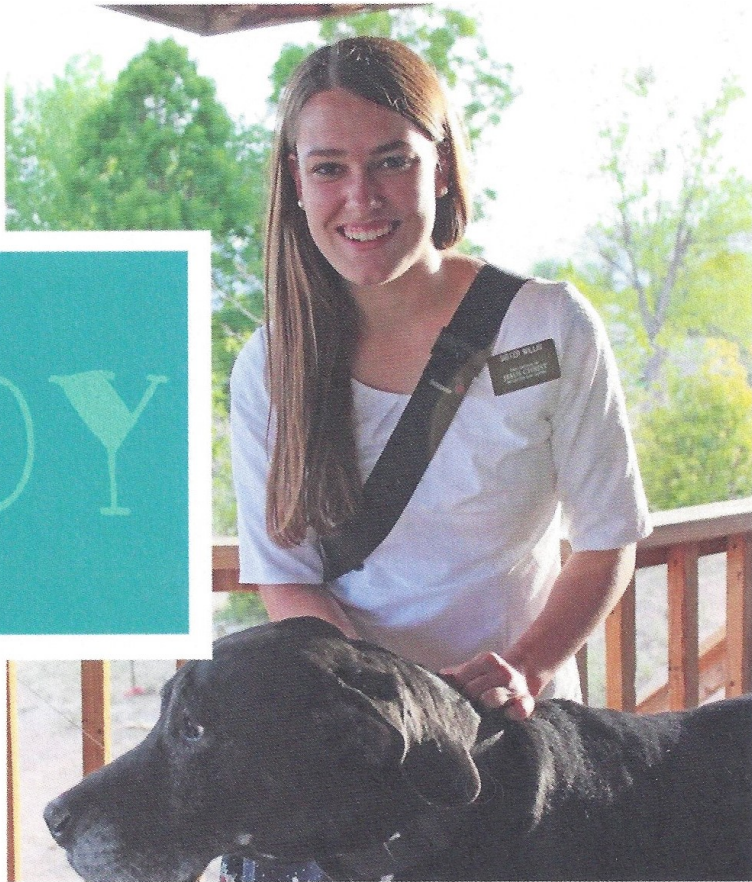
We wish you the best in the coming year.

Love, Tim *et al*





Hannah (right) with her companion, Sister Olsen, on the grounds of the original Arizona Temple (in Mesa)



Holiday Greetings from the Willis Girls
Sophia (14), Grace (11), and Lucy (16) & Sister Hannah Willis (Arizona Phoenix Mission)

The editor let me down on this year's Christmas card. Lucy is 17, not 16.



Grace (between Lucy, Ceres, and Sophie) models a gift from Grandma Carolyn on Christmas morning



Crystal on her new trainer (the green and silver thing attached the rear wheel of her bike).