

the Famlet monthly

January 29, 2017

Volume 20, Number 1

Dear Family,

Dad didn't travel excessively for work when I was a kid, but he was gone enough to rack up a lot of Marriott points. As a result, Marriott properties factored prominently in our family vacations. Being a Willis, Dad did not see any particular reason why the seven of us should need more than one hotel room, and consequently, my brothers and I grew up thinking there was no reason to feel self-conscious about hauling two or three sleeping bags through an upscale J.W. Marriott lobby. Owing to Dad's Marriott Rewards status, we were typically upgraded to the concierge level, which gave my brothers and me access to the lounge, where we tormented business patrons several times a day while attempting to figure out how many free bottles of soda we could smuggle out at once.

These memories came flooding back to me last weekend as my three oldest brothers and I were checking into the Raleigh Marriott Crabtree Valley. The four of us were there for a "brothers weekend" that, for reasons I won't get into here, all of our wives not only permitted but actually seemed to think was a good idea.

Grant's office, which is spitting distance from the Capitol, was closed for the Inauguration. Andrew's office, which is further down the Mall—closer to the Lincoln Memorial—encouraged telework that day. My office is in Tysons Corner—nowhere near the Inauguration, but I don't add much value there and no one really cares whether I actually show up. And so at a little before 10:30 on Inauguration Day, Grant and Andrew picked me up at home and the three of us embarked on the four-plus-hour drive to North Carolina, where Matt lives.

We listened to our new president's inaugural address in the car. No comment.

We picked Matt up at the dental practice he recently purchased. Andra was there too, and the two of them gave us a tour (including free toothbrushes!). It's a homey office with nice furniture and five (I think) exam rooms. Matt is the only dentist, and it looks like Andra does a lot of the back office work.

Matt kissed Andra goodbye, and the four of us were on our own.

We had dinner at a Lebanese place, saw a movie (*The Founder*) and checked into the hotel. I'm fairly certain all four of us have enough Marriott points that each of us could have gotten his own room without making a noticeable dent in any of our respective balances. But being Willises, we failed to see the logic in that. And that's how it came to happen, to the bemusement of the woman at the registration desk, that four large men—a dentist (Matt), an attorney (Grant), an economist (Andrew), and a whatever-I-am—all checked into the same hotel room (on the concierge level, naturally, though the lounge unfortunately is closed on weekends). No sleeping bags were necessary. Andrew and I shared one queen-sized bed, while Matt and Grant split the other one. A fair amount of farting and frivolity ensued, and for several brief, fleeting moments, we were all 14 years old again. It was great!

The next day (Saturday) included a round of golf, an N.C. State basketball game (they lost to Wake Forest), and another movie. The gathering ended rather abruptly before dawn on Sunday morning when Grant, Andrew, and I said good-bye to Matt and headed north in time to make it to the Olney First Ward, where Grant is the bishop and Andrew is the elders quorum president.

Our return to 14-year-old-dom ended as quickly as it began.

The Raleigh weekend came on the heels of a weeklong trip with Crystal to Kauai. I can think of few things more annoying than reading a detailed description of somebody else's trip to Hawaii (or anywhere) and so I'll spare you that, but we really did have a lovely time. I haven't been to very many places (this trip took me nearly a thousand miles further from home than I had ever been in my life) and while I can't say whether Kauai is the most beautiful place on earth, it is certainly the most beautiful place I have ever been. I never wanted to get out of the ocean. Accustomed as I am to the murky surf of Ocean City, it was hard for me to believe that any natural body of water could be so blue and clear and full of so many pretty fish. It was like swimming in an aquarium, and I couldn't get enough of it. Crystal's dad and Karel, who put us up in their timeshare, were fabulous hosts. They've been going there every year for the past quarter-century, and I now see why. They took us to many of their favorite haunts and were just wonderful. We are equally grateful to Aunt Coco for staying at our house and shuttling the girls to their various destinations throughout the week. I heard a saying on the island: "If you love Kauai, tell your friends to go to Maui." I recommend Maui.

Thursday was Lucy's last day splitting time between RICA and Northwood H.S. As of tomorrow, she begins mainstreaming full time at Northwood, much to her relief and satisfaction. She retains the option of receiving her Northwood diploma this June as part of RICA's graduation ceremony, and to my delight, she has expressed some interest in doing that. Attending RICA's graduation (honoring perhaps a dozen graduates or less) sounds far more tolerable to me than having to endure a string of several hundred Northwood graduates, each name punctuated by shrill cheers and excessive clapping, despite repeated requests from the podium to "kindly hold your applause until all of our graduates have been recognized." It tends to bring out the worst in me. (And the worst in me is pretty insufferable. Ask Crystal.)

Both Lucy and Sophie are planning to audition for Northwood's spring musical this week. Unfortunately, Sophie seems to be coming down with the same cold that afflicted me last week. If the virus runs the same course in her body that it ran in mine, then she will have virtually no voice on the day of her audition. Fortunately, Sophie deals with adversity better than most people do (certainly better than I do) and I suspect she'll be okay.

Grace is back to hitting up every adult she encounters to buy Girl Scout cookies. I'm trying to kick sugar again (to the extent that's possible; it certainly isn't practical or particularly fun) and so I've told Grace I'll contribute cash to her troop in lieu of buying cookies this year. Grace seems okay with that. This is also a better deal for the troop, which clears less than a dollar on every \$4 box of cookies she sells. Most cookie profit is captured by the council. [It's a racket.](#)

I suspect that 100 years from now, when future generations learn that Girl Scouts used to sell sugar-laden cookies to raise funds, they will react in the same way that we might react today if we were to find out that Girl Scouts 100 years ago fundraised by selling cigarettes. Crystal gets annoyed when I say buzzkill things like this around the house (even though I'm right) which could be one reason she did not object to the brothers weekend. She's a pretty swell gal in any event.

We send our love.

-Tim et al





Above: Crystal overlooking Na Pali coast

Right: Na Pali coast from the air

Below: Crystal in the helicopter





Kilauea National Wildlife Refuge

Above: Me, Karel, Rod

Below: Crystal looks at birds





Above: Me atop the Makawehi Cliffs @ Poipu. (You can't really tell, but I'm standing on the edge of a cliff.)

Left: Shaved Ice from JoJo's

Below: Waimea Canyon—The Grand Canyon of the Pacific



January 2017



Meanwhile, back at home

Above: Lucy bought herself a mermaid. (She enjoys swimming with it.)

Below: Sophie dives during yesterday's meet. (Trust me, it's her.)

