

THE FAMLET

MONTHLY



Dear Family,

In my youth, I was taught that I should drive *defensively*. I'm not entirely certain what that means, but I'm pretty sure I don't do it. I wouldn't say that I drive *offensively*—at least, not all the time—sometimes I do. But the adverb on which I usually settle to describe how I drive is *assertively*. In a traffic environment like ours, it's often the only way to make forward progress.

To the consternation of some motorists, I am also a rather assertive bicyclist. I usually stop (or come very, very close to stopping) at Stop signs while riding my bike. I also stop at red lights. This isn't to say that I always wait for the green to go, particularly when no one's around, but I always stop.

I treat four-way stops on my bike approximately the same way you treat them in your car. (Unless you're one of those unicorns who actually come to a full and complete stop even when no one's there and it's obviously going to be your turn, in which case I salute you but cannot really relate to you.) The difference comes when a four-way stop produces a lineup of cars. In this case, I roll past everybody and position myself alongside the lead car. When it becomes that car's turn to go, I go at the same time. I'm not sure whether this is technically legal, but I think it's reasonable.

Not everybody agrees. I pulled this maneuver a couple of weeks ago while riding home from work. I was heading north on Sligo Creek Parkway when I encountered a significant backup of cars waiting their turn at the four-way-stop intersection with Dennis



Crystal's and my Trek "family." A great bunch of kids!



Avenue. I did what I always do—I rolled to the front of the queue and followed the lead car out. The car I followed continued straight, and I turned right onto Dennis.

This did not sit well with the driver of the car stopped on the eastbound side of Dennis waiting to go straight. It was his turn next, and he immediately started honking at me. And I don't mean "beep beep" honking. He *leaned* on that sucker, holding it down to produce one continuous blast as he crossed Sligo Creek and followed me up Dennis. Rather than passing me on Dennis, he (I never saw the driver, but I'm choosing to assume it was a man) followed right on my back wheel, without releasing his horn. I made an immediate left onto Tenbrook Drive, and he followed right behind me, somehow without letting go of the horn. I was impressed that he was able to do this. By the time I reached the top of the first hill on Tenbrook I was laughing—in part because I could relate to the driver's frustration and in part because what else could I do? He was clearly willing to invest at least 45 seconds into letting me know how upset he was about the two seconds I may have cost him back at the four-way stop, but how much more was he going to be willing to contribute to this relationship? Not much, it turned out. He finally let go of his horn as we crested the hill and he passed me, revealing an array of bumper stickers expressing a political worldview that I do not share. This of course made me happy.

In an effort to be a little less like that driver, I approached Lucy's two graduations this month resolving that whatever stupid things were spoken from the stage or shouted from the audience, I would not allow myself to be annoyed.

This was easy to do at Lucy's graduation from RICA—the special education school in Rockville where Lucy spent most of her high school career (and where she lived for just under a year). RICA graduation was an intimate and inspiring affair, with just 16 graduates, an entertaining and well suited commencement speaker, and an over-abundance of palpable love and gratitude.

Northwood's graduation, one week later, was more typical. The ceremony began with the principal instructing the assembled masses at DAR Constitution Hall that this was meant to be a "formal and dignified" occasion. It was a nice gesture on her part, but it was also a complete waste of time and oxygen since no one seemed to know (or care) that "formal and dignified"

More Trek photos



Above: Me (with shovel) and Crystal and the back of our cart

Below: Sophie (center) with some of her family at the start



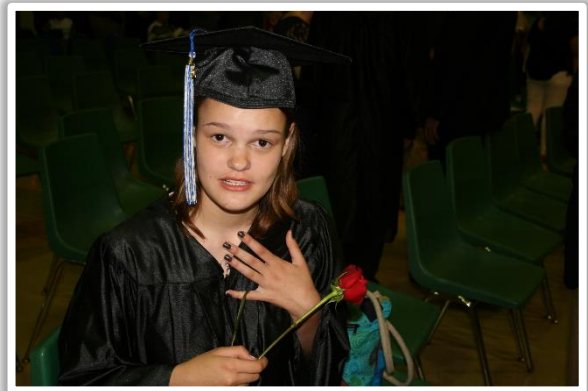
Lucy's family (Lucy is back right) during the Women's Pull.

means you're supposed to sit quietly and not yell stuff. I would never go so far as to contend that one of the side-effects of a largely unchurched generation, in addition to a cohort of young adults who are increasingly intolerant of people with religious convictions that do not conform with prevailing social views, is a cohort that is developmentally incapable of quietly enduring 90 minutes of boredom. I choose not to make this facile argument, but the thought has occurred to me.

Northwood's commencement marked the first time I had ever heard The Pledge of Allegiance recited in Spanish, which I thought was pretty cool and, like a growing number of things, caused me to tear up a little, even though I didn't understand many of the words. The ceremony included four student speakers in lieu of an imported commencement speaker. They did a nice job and were an improvement over Hannah's graduation from Blair three years ago, which featured then-Secretary of Labor (and now-Professional Angry Person and [Potty Mouth](#)) Tom Perez. His commencement address three years ago was fine but might have been more entertaining had it incorporated some of the colorful language Perez likes to use in his new job.

A highlight of the ceremony was the two men reading the graduates' names—getting through all of them in just 28 minutes (I timed it). They accomplished this by mercifully plowing ahead and not waiting for all the hooting after each name to die down before reading the next one. The end result was that you could only hear about 60 percent of the names, but who cares? Twenty-eight minutes!

We celebrated with food. Baking a Smith Island Cake has been a last-day-of-school ritual in our house for many, many years. It's an interesting cake to look at—10 or so thin layers of a yellow cake with a kind of chocolate frosting between each one—but it's never been my favorite cake to eat. That changed this year when Crystal made a *red velvet* Smith Island Cake with cream cheese frosting—thus incorporating the *other* two colors in Maryland's awesome state flag. (Smith Island Cake is Maryland's official state dessert, and whatever your state flag looks like, [ours is better](#).) I only mention all this here because the red velvet Smith Island Cake might have been the best cake I've ever eaten. A typical Smith Island Cake sits on our kitchen counter for a week or more before being consumed. This one went faster than a loaf of challah. (Well, not



Above: Lucy celebrates her first of two graduations (the more pleasant one) with three of her grandparents.

Below: Grace indulges in last-day-o school Smith Island Cake.



really. Challah doesn't last an afternoon in our Gentile house—the cake lasted a couple of days.) I had some for breakfast on Father's Day.

Summer is now in full swing with all its usual stuff. All three girls are nominally on the swim team. Grace begrudgingly attends most practices and swims in all the A meets, mainly because there are only 3 or 4 other girls in her age group on the team. Lucy goes to practice occasionally and typically leaves early because it triggers her anxiety. Baby steps are steps. Sophie's new job as a lifeguard gives her an excuse for missing a lot of practices, but it's a fun team and a friendly group of people to associate with for two months each year.

All of us, except Grace, missed last weekend's swim team events because of Pioneer Trek. You may [recall](#) that our stake elected to cancel the quadrennial event last year on account of the extreme heat. We rescheduled for this summer and, rather than trying to go it alone, asked our neighbors in the Seneca Maryland Stake if they would mind having us join up with them.

Seneca graciously agreed to take us in, and a year-long planning partnership was born. It was an interesting marriage. While our stakes border one another, they differ quite a bit in composition. Although our stake has 400 more overall members, Seneca, for a variety of reasons, has more than twice as many youth. Consequently, our kids got to meet a lot of new friends, and I don't think the arrangement could have worked out better for us. (I'm not sure how Seneca felt about it.)

Trek is a quasi-historical re-enactment of a relatively small, but highly romanticized subset of Mormon pioneers who migrated to Utah in the 1850s by pushing their belongings across much of the country in wooden handcarts. For reasons that I don't fully understand, some modern Mormons attempt to teach their teenage children a variety of lessons by inviting them to dress up like it's the 19th Century and push very heavy handcarts 20 miles through the woods and mountains. It's hard to say whether all the desired lessons are learned and internalized, but we had a good time.

The 150 or so youth were divided into 14 "families," each with its own handcart and led by an adult "Ma" and "Pa."



Sophie's first day on the job.

Owing to my current church position, the original plan had me participating as a "Company Captain," i.e., a largely ceremonial role with no significant responsibilities. I was looking forward to this. The last-minute loss of a Ma-Pa couple, however, dashed my dreams of doing nothing, and Crystal and I found ourselves leading, teaching, cooking with, playing with and surviving with a family of 5 girls and 6 boys. Nine of these 11 were from Seneca and they were all great. Not one whiner in the bunch. Heavy rain on Friday night forced some changes to the original plan, and I was sick most of the time, but no one died, and everything seemed to work out okay. Lucy and Sophie enjoyed their families and claim to have liked the experience. I'm glad we did it.

"We can do hard things" was a popular mantra repeated among the Trekkers. Speaking of hard things, today marks 18 months since the start of (2012 Trek alumna) Hannah's mission. She comes home two weeks from Tuesday and speaks in sacrament meeting on July 23rd. We are looking forward to all of this. Feel free to stop in.

We send our love.

-Tim, *et al*