

THE FAMLET

MONTHLY



Dear Family,

Are you familiar with the Dunning-Kruger effect? It's a principle named for a couple of psychologists who posit that one (particularly unfortunate) side-effect of incompetence is an inability to recognize that you are, in fact, incompetent. (It helps explain why the most tone-deaf member of any ward choir tends to be the person who sings the loudest.) It's an extraordinarily humbling concept to consider. There are, after all, so many things that I already know I don't do well. How many more must there be that I'm not even aware of?

I got to thinking about this while camping this weekend with some of the young men in our ward—about a half-dozen 11- and 12-year-old deacons and few older boys who came along. Camping isn't really my thing—and winter camping *really* isn't my thing (it's probably been 30 years since I last camped in sub-freezing weather)—but I'm an Eagle Scout and can muddle through with the right gear.

(At least I *think* I can—there's always the possibility that I'm suffering from a Dunning-Kruger delusion, but let's put that to the side.)

The young men in our ward are all excellent boys, and I love them, but I lost track of how many times I had to ask my friend and neighbor, Rich Krikava, "Do you remember being this dumb when you were 12?" He couldn't, and neither could I. But the reality of it is that I was probably much, much dumber—I just can't remember it because of the D-K effect.



Sophie (or possibly someone resembling her and wearing her swim cap) swims and dives at different NHS swim meets.



It all came to a head while we were breaking camp. It took until 11:00 a.m. (seriously, *eleven o'clock*) to eat breakfast, take the tents down and pack everything up when we noticed a stray pair of boots sitting near to the fire ring.

“Whose boots are these?” the scoutmaster asked.

Silence fell over the camp as each boy shrugged his shoulders.

“They didn’t just appear overnight,” the patient scoutmaster continued. “Who brought these boots?”

The boys took turns disavowing ownership of the boots until one of the older boys was able to convince his younger brother that they belonged to him. The younger boy sheepishly claimed his boots and we were on our way. I suppose there was a time in my life when I wouldn’t have been able to recall having brought a pair of boots somewhere—even *after being confronted with that very pair of boots*. But for the life of me, I just can’t remember it.

We spent the night at the Marsden Tract Campsite—on a narrow bit of wooded land that separates the C&O Canal from the Potomac River, walking distance from the Billy Goat Trail. All of this is managed by the National Park Service, which means it was technically closed because of the government shutdown. But we had a reservation, and obviously no rangers were going to show up and kick us out. (They had, however, helpfully padlocked the bathroom and all but one of the porta-johns—and you can probably imagine what the condition of that one was.) It was while we were at the campsite that news broke first of the Senate vote to reopen the government, followed a short time later by news of the House vote and the president’s signature. This came as particularly good news to my friend Rich (who was camping with us) who works for the Federal Emergency Management Agency and was wondering when he’d get paid again. I’m trying to imagine 26th Century anthropologists’ puzzling over 21st Century Americans and our collective, apparent wish to be governed by petulant children.

This weekend’s campout was plenty frigid—my tent and sleeping bag were still caked with frost when I had to pack them up—but the Martin Luther King holiday brought about as cold and windy a morning as I can remember. Crystal commemorated the life of the slain civil rights leader by playing basketball with a bunch of other Latter-day Saint moms in Kensington (as she does



Sophie and Grace -- Duckpin bowling on MLK Day



every Monday morning). I mentioned in last month's letter that she had begun taking all this seriously enough to trim her nails in an effort to improve her ball handling. I was wrong about that. Apparently she trimmed her nails *to avoid gouging other players*, which is thoughtful of her. No man would ever think to do that. I don't imagine her ball handling is any better than mine (and I'm awful) but she's now in the market for some *bona fide* basketball shoes and has started practicing on non-Mondays, so that could all change.

The cold weather has pushed Crystal off her bicycle and into spin class. You are probably already familiar with the concept of spin class. But if not, this is where people drive their cars to a building and then go inside to ride pretend bicycles while an "instructor" shouts encouragement. The people then dismount their pretend bikes, leave the building, and get back in their cars to drive someplace else. Many people do this even when the weather is conducive to actual cycling. I suspect that discovering evidence of this practice will also baffle 26th century anthropologists.

While Crystal was at basketball on Monday the girls and I went shopping! I need to take note of what a good time I had. I've been a father of daughters for over 22 years, and I'm only just now realizing how fun it is to shop with them. Apart from a few loaves of bread from Great Harvest, I don't think we even bought anything, but we made stops at Old Navy and REI and it was great. After not being able to find a backpacking backpack in my (admittedly modest) price range at REI, I texted Andrew to ask if I could borrow his (Sam's, actually) for this weekend's campout. He said I could, but that they were on their way out the door to go duckpin bowling. And so the girls and I went duckpin bowling. I'm not good at duckpins, but nobody is, so it's fun that way. (And I got the backpack.)

Shopping, duckpins and lunch at Sarku was a full enough day for me but not for Sophie and Grace, who opted for ice skating in the afternoon. This proved to be a fateful decision, as it ended with Grace's fracturing her right tibia.

I hate ice skating. I can't do it well, and it has always struck me as an activity that is more dangerous than people think. I don't understand how it is that people who are afraid to ride a bicycle in traffic (which I suspect is *less* dangerous than most people believe) think nothing of strapping their wobbly ankles and feet atop a pair of skinny blades and attempting to



Above: Grace and Sophie shopping at Old Navy on MLK Day

Below: Grace's broken leg -- Children's Hospital 22 Jan 2019



gracefully glide across an unforgivingly hard and slippery surface surrounded by a bunch of other numbskulls who have no idea what they're doing. I don't see the fun in it, and it astounds me that there aren't dozens of catastrophic injuries every day at every rink.

We assumed that Grace had merely sprained her ankle and didn't learn that her leg was broken until the following day when Crystal took her to the doctor. An orthopaedic surgeon diagnosed the break and then referred us to a *pediatric* orthopaedic surgeon at Children's National Hospital, who did another x-ray, drugged Grace up so he could "manipulate" her leg a bit, ran a CT scan, and scheduled surgery for tomorrow. She's becoming more adept on her crutches and is grateful for all the visits and plates of cookies. She hasn't been back to school and seems okay with that. She has been expanding her mind by binge-watching episodes of *Cheers*, which makes me happy, and *Stargate: Atlantis*, which I imagine makes her brother-in-law happy.

Grace has been magnanimous in sharing her cookie bounty with other members of the family, including Sophie, who gave up on her no-sugar diet this month. (I could relate, having given up on no-sugar diets many, many times.) I asked her whether she felt any healthier while she was off sugar.

"No, just less happy," she replied.

I get that.

The high school swim season is winding down and I actually worked the automation table for a couple of meets. (Automation is also my regular job at summer swim meets.) I like this job because it makes it easier for me to know when Sophie is swimming and where to find her. This is otherwise hard because, with her cap and goggles on, she is more or less indistinguishable from all the other girls on the swim team. (Her name is printed on her cap, but that's hard to make out from far away.)

She's easier to spot on the diving board. My furloughed friend Rich (who is getting an unprecedented third mention in this month's letter) recently got pressed into service judging the diving. I was hoping our friendship would work in Sophie's favor, but as a former competitive diver, he actually tends to judge more harshly than most of the others. His was often the low score (which gets thrown out) and I had to start referring to him as "the East German judge," which means nothing to my children and others too young to remember the Olympics when East Germany was a country. (This was back in the day when *Republicans* accused *Democrats* of making common cause with the Russians.)

Times change, but things that matter don't. What divides us is continually shifting; what binds us together is as constant as the God of heaven and earth. I am grateful to be bound to you.

Love, Tim

p.s. Speaking of swimming, I forgot to mention that Lucy has discovered a local mermaid club that she swims with at a nearby pool. Remind me to get some pictures of *that* next month...



Because winter camping is so much more fun when they padlock the bathrooms.