

THE FAMLET MONTHLY



Dear Family,

My alma mater is a very large, private university in Utah. I feel fortunate to have gone there notwithstanding our mediocre football team and platitudinous unofficial motto: "The world is our campus." (It's okay to snicker. Even we proud alums make fun of it.)

Dad's alma mater, 40 miles north of mine, is a slightly older, slightly smaller, public university with a better football team (in a once-great conference that now stinks). I don't think they have a motto, which must be a source of great embarrassment for them. This is probably why Dad used to mock my school's motto by inverting it into "The campus is our world."

I hadn't realized how right Dad was to do that until this month when Hannah took what the BYU nursing program termed a "study abroad" trip.....to San Diego. I'm told that some nursing students actually leave the country, which is presumably how the program justifies its name.

In May she will be studying abroad in Washington, D.C. We were hoping she'd stay with us, but instead they will be at some hotel in Alexandria, Va. This will make getting to the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Md., an interesting challenge. Whoever is in charge of this program does not appear to have a very firm grasp of basic geography.

I don't fully understand the purpose of these trips, but the San Diego jaunt appears to have been a



Hannah and some seals. San Diego, Calif.

recruitment effort by the U.S. Navy. Hannah spent some time on a Navy hospital ship, the USNS *Mercy*, as well as on a decommissioned aircraft carrier/museum, the USS *Midway*. Both boats impressed her, but I don't believe she has any plans to follow her uncle and grandfather into the world of Navy medicine. (She informs me, however, that lots of civilian nurses work in military hospitals.) She also spent time with some non-Navy seals on the beach and visited the San Diego Temple. She reports having a few male classmates in the BYU nursing program, but this is not obvious from any of the accompanying pictures.

If Hannah were to stay with us in May, she may have needed to evict Grace from her old bedroom. Grace has taken up residence in Hannah's room—the only bedroom on the main floor of the house—since breaking her tibia, just above her ankle, last month.

If memory serves, I posted last month's letter on the day before Grace's surgery. I am very sorry to have kept you in suspense all this time, but, one screw through the shin bone later, the procedure appears to have been successful. It was performed at Children's National, a hospital 8 miles south of here. We had to drive, of course, but I would have gotten there faster on my bicycle.

I run past two perfectly good hospitals that are much closer on a regular basis. (Holy Cross and Washington Adventist are both accessible from the Sligo Creek Trail.) But the proximity of Grace's fracture to her still-maturing growth plate necessitated a particular specialist and the visit to the special hospital. You can't turn around at Children's National without seeing a banner boasting of its ranking as a "Top 5" pediatric hospital nationally. This degree of peacocking made me nervous, as it seems to me that the truly best people don't need to invest so much into telling you how great they are. But I was pleased with the care Grace got (and continues to get) there. I like her doctor, even though he looked to be closer to Hannah's age than mine. (They just keep looking younger.)

I had to wonder how ancient the doctor thought we were. Several weeks ago, on the morning after my 47th birthday, a man struck up a conversation with me in the shower at the YMCA. I've decided there are two types of people in the world: those who feel comfortable carrying on a casual conversation with a fellow naked stranger in the shower, and those of us who just want to get dressed and out of there as



Hannah "abroad" with fellow nursing students in San Diego.



quickly as possible without talking to anybody. I am decidedly the second kind of person, but I didn't want to be rude to the guy (who looked to be at least Dad's age) and so I held up my end of the discussion as we moved from the shower to the swimsuit centrifuge, and into the locker room where I put my clothes on as fast as I could. I don't remember everything we talked about (I seem to recall money laundering and bitcoin coming up). All I remember for sure is, as I was walking out, the guy—again, probably in his 80s—asked me if I was *retired*. I wanted to ask him (but didn't), "*Just how old do you think I am?*" I'm balding and have this gray beard now that probably makes me look older than I am. But seriously, *retired*? I've certainly come a long way from when I was 17 and the lady working the McDonald's drive-thru wouldn't give me my food until I showed her my license because she couldn't believe I was old enough to drive.

Anyway, Grace transitioned from her cast to a boot today. But it will be at least a couple more weeks before she can start putting weight on it. She's getting pretty good with her crutches, though they seem to be taking a toll on her shoulders. Crystal suggested to Grace that she might be more comfortable using one of those knee scooters. But Grace has never seen anyone use one at school, and middle school isn't the kind of place where you want to be the first person to do anything, and so that was the end of that idea.

Sophie's high school swim season wrapped up on Saturday. The state championship meet was held at the University of Maryland (9 miles southeast of here—unofficial motto: *Fatti maschii, parole femine* - "strong deeds, gentle words," which is pretty great, as mottos go). The school, whose membership in the Big Ten Conference makes about as much geographic sense as Utah's in the Pac-12, has a top-notch aquatics facility but no swim team. Sophie went to the meet as a relay alternate but ultimately did not swim.

The end-of-season team banquet ended in the customary way with the coach saying a few nice things about each individual swimmer. I found what she said about Sophie to be thought provoking. While tacitly acknowledging that Sophie was not among the fastest swimmers on the team, she said that Sophie was valuable because she worked hard to regularly collect third-, fourth-, and fifth-place finishes, all of which secure points for the team—points that are particularly important at the margin in close meets.



Grace and her crutches



Sophie atop Sugarloaf Mountain (hiking with the Scouts and me) 16 Feb.

It got me thinking about how we all want to be exceptional in one way or another (to borrow from Adam Smith, “Man naturally desires not only to be loved, but to be lovely...he desires not only praise, but praiseworthiness...”) and how we seem to want it even more for our children—almost certainly in part because of how they reflect on us. But in a world with nearly 8 billion people, no matter how hard we try, we are likely to find ourselves somewhere in the fat part of the distribution in most of the things we undertake. And yet, there seems to be value in exploring and undertaking new things and in seeking to become as good at them as we can—even if our best isn’t as good as a lot of other people’s. I have found some modicum of happiness in life by coming to terms with these two sometimes competing realities.

This could be why I find such satisfaction in triathlon. I’m never going to qualify for Kona (in part because, unlike many elite age groupers, I don’t dope, but I have other limitations, as well). But the journey is fulfilling. I give it my best shot, finish somewhere in the middle of the pack, and try to be a little better next time. I’m content with that. I sometimes see people wearing a particular shirt at triathlons that makes me smile. [Trigger warning: certain members of my parents’ generation will find some of the verbs that follow offensive.] The shirt reads: “Why suck at just one sport when you can suck at three?”

Part of mortality is learning how to cope with sucking at things (and learning how to deal with and love people who suck at different things than you do). One of the happiest truths the Gospel has taught me is that our value is not diminished by our average-ness.

So now Sophie wants to try to join the high school tennis team. I don’t think she’ll mind my telling you that she is not currently very good at tennis. As if that matters. Good luck, kid!

Speaking of sports we’re no good at, Crystal continues to play basketball with other (younger) stay-at-home moms on Monday mornings. She is now the proud owner of basketball shoes, several bumps on the head, and at least two jammed fingers that she has started taping together. A violent game, basketball.

This time next week, Lucy (who is decidedly *not* average) will be living at the Workforce & Technology Center in Baltimore where she will receive 10 weeks of [professional animal worker training](#) from the State of Maryland’s Department of Rehabilitation Services in partnership with the Community College of Baltimore County. Think good thoughts for her.

We’ll do the same for you.

Love, Tim



Me, age 47. Apparently I look older than that.