

THE FAMLET

MONTHLY



Dear Family,

I'm not very good at event planning. And so back in January, when the ward council was divvying up responsibility for this year's activities, I quickly jumped on the July 4th pancake breakfast, mostly because I thought it sounded like the easiest one and something I could fairly easily turn over to my Young Men.

My plan backfired when, due to a calendar adjustment, half of the Young Men spent the week of July 4th at Scout camp, while almost all the rest of them were at what I guess will turn out to have been the last-ever EFY conference.

[No one from our family went to EFY this year. Sophie went last year and didn't like it enough to want to go back. Grace wanted to go, but we didn't get her signed up in time, which makes me feel bad, but we'll get over it. I never went to EFY as a kid. Rightly or wrongly, I was under the impression that it was "youth conference for rich people," and at any rate, I can't say I had much interest in going to any more church than was required of me. To be honest, I don't remember for sure whether I felt that way then. But it's how I feel now, and I don't always recognize the difference.]

Anyway, everybody's absence left me to carry a lot more of the July 4th burden than I anticipated. But thanks to the magic of SignupGenius, combined with considerable whining on my part, combined with a group of men who showed up at the church early that morning expecting to play basketball and whom I



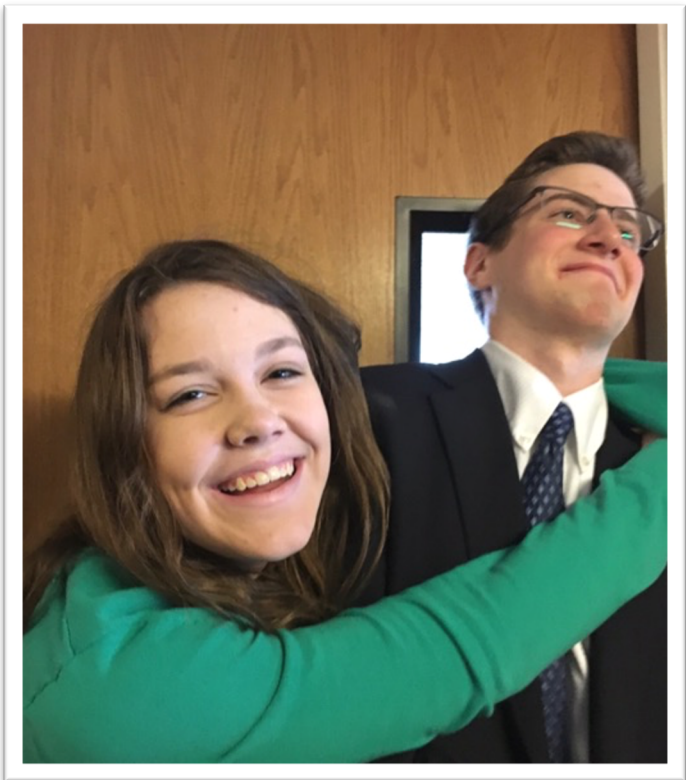
Group selfie with Uncle Rick in Downtown Silver Spring

conscripted into helping haul a bunch of tables and chairs outside, the event came together without my having to do much of anything other than direct traffic. The pancakes and eggs got cooked and eaten, we wound up with far more fruit salad and O.J. than was needed, the children's bicycle parade was a hit, a good time seemed to be had by most, and I'm just glad I'm not in charge of the Christmas party.

July 4th breakfasts have the benefit of missing the hottest part of the day, when you'd be crazy to be anywhere other than inside or at the pool. Morning events also tend to avoid the thunderstorms, which are a 50/50 proposition on any given summer afternoon/evening. This year's July 4th thunderstorms washed out most of the pool's holiday festivities. We managed to get the potluck lunch, water balloon toss and ice-cream-eating contest in, but nonstop thunder and occasional lightning cancelled the headliner events, including the greased watermelon fight and high-dive big-splash competition (which typically results in having to refill the pool and features more highly scrutinized judging than at the Olympics).

A couple of weeks later, at the end-of-season swim team banquet, Diane Sauter (a fellow swim team parent, not a relative) asked me whether the event would make it into the Famlet. Her question made my day. I don't fully understand why I get such a dopamine kick just from finding out that somebody is actually reading this thing, but it's a fairly unmistakable feeling. Diane teaches at the middle school whose promotion ceremony I savaged in [last month's letter](#). Once the dopamine hit had worn off, my next feeling was fear that she would give me grief about that. But she had only kind things to say. The banquet had some things in common with a middle school promotion ceremony (and actually lasted longer) but for reasons I'm still trying to put my finger on, I didn't find it annoying at all.

Our family has been going to these banquets since 2003—Hannah's first year on the team. Seventeen seasons. I'm sure I used to hate them (large gathering, loud place, potluck food geared mainly toward children (including about 38 different varieties of mac and cheese), uncomfortable chairs, lots of extraneous remarks—I mean, what's not to hate if you're me?). But my appreciation for these events has grown by degrees over time as I have slowly come to see the swim team for what it is—a lovely community of neighbors as supportive and welcoming as what I've experienced my entire life at church. The only overlap between these two groups is



Above: Grace accosts the departing Elder William Kemper

Below: Crystal and Wendy make an unnecessarily difficult Dutch oven something at YW Camp.



us, but it shouldn't surprise me that I routinely hear people in both groups refer to them as a "family."

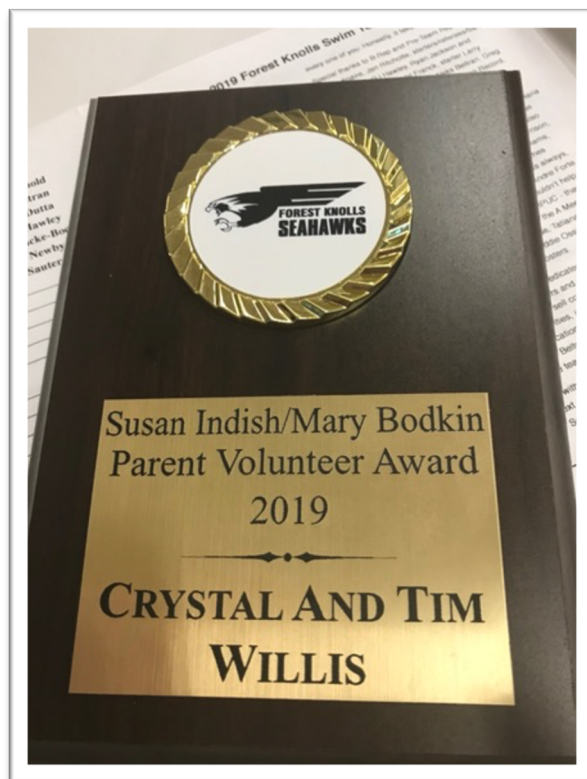
It occurs to me that at a church function, I feel perfectly comfortable plopping myself down at literally any table I choose. Even if a table is full, my standing at church is such that, no matter who is sitting there, I feel not the slightest compunction about squeezing in and making room for myself. I haven't quite reached that level of comfort at the pool, and it isn't because swim team people are any less welcoming than people at church. It does, however, makes me think that I could be doing a better job of helping certain people at church feel more like full-fledged members of the family.

If I'm honest, I probably also enjoyed this year's banquet more than usual because some of the "extraneous remarks" were about me. Crystal and I were (unexpectedly) given the team's annual "Susan Indish/Mary Bodkin Parent Volunteer Award" (named for two swim team moms who died young many years ago—Crystal and I are among a vanishing minority of current swim team parents who knew them). We were not any more deserving of this year's award than any number of other people, but I think I know what happened. Crystal has been a steady and reliable contributor to the team since Hannah was 6 years old, while, for 15 of those 17 seasons, I comfortably played the role of what we might characterize at church as the "less-active husband." Then, last year (not coincidentally, after being released from a church position of some prominence but no particular consequence) I found myself wanting to actually start pulling my weight on the swim team. I suspect it was this *change* in my involvement, rather than the absolute level of my involvement, that prompted the award. And it's not simply for alphabetical reasons that Crystal's name is listed first on the plaque.

The competitive season ended for us with the team capturing the division championship at a meet in Germantown. Sophie did not swim in that meet, but Grace did. I don't think Grace will mind my telling you that she talks a lot faster than she swims and that her selection for this meet had more to do with a dearth of girls in her age group on our team than anything else. She swam the 50 fly and finished 12th. And even though the swimmers in her event numbered fewer than 13, I was proud of her because a) she swam it a full second faster than she ever had before, and b) she swam it considerably faster than I can swim the 50 fly. For me, swimming 50 meters of butterfly



Division Champs. Sophie's somewhere in the back.



means swimming 25 meters of butterfly, resting on the wall for 30 seconds, and then swimming the rest of it. I'm impressed by anyone who can do it all in one shot. (And besides, finishing 12th at Divisionals still earns one point for the team, so put it on the board, Grace!)

I wasn't joking about the pride I took in Grace's one-second improvement. A recurring theme in these letters is the comfort I take in my mediocrity. But I only mean that as it pertains to my performance relative to others. I hope never to be content with where I am relative to what I am capable of becoming. One of the nice things about understanding "God" to be loving parents is that, while they may love us no matter what, they know that we will never find lasting happiness in simply "being who we are." They want us to progress—to continuously change and improve. It's uncomfortable, but I think it's supposed to be. It's why we're here. "Therefore, wo be unto him that is at ease in Zion! Wo be unto him that crieth: All is well!" (2 Ne. 28:24-25) I suspect the applicability of those verses extends far beyond what typically gets discussed at church.

Speaking of uncomfortable things, Nurse Hannah got to pronounce time of death for the first time this month. Curiously, Hannah's boss marked the occasion by giving her a bottle of Gatorade and a Twix bar—fittingly, two substances that contribute to human mortality and morbidity. Hannah seemed to appreciate it, though.

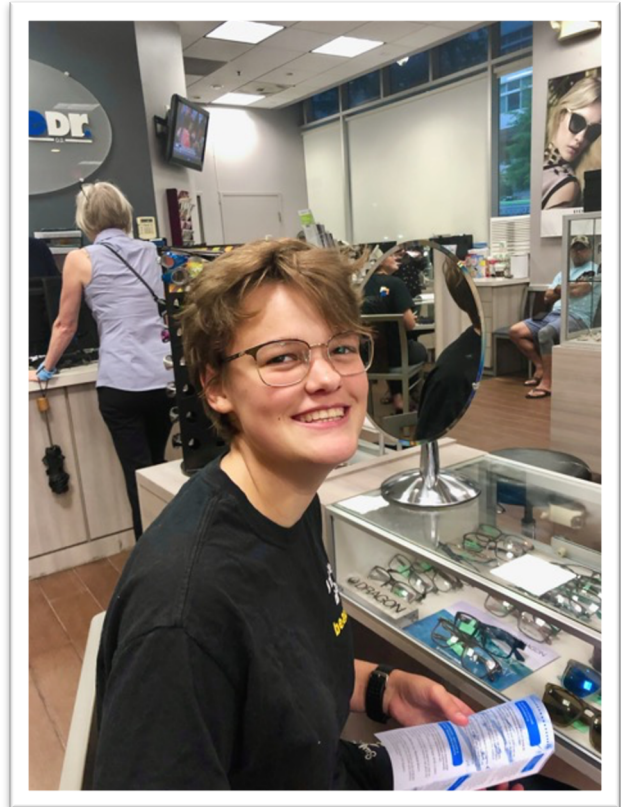
Sophie and Grace went to Young Women's Camp this month. They were unexpectedly joined there by Crystal when one of the leaders was unable to go at the last minute and another one injured her leg. I'm told there was some talk of cancelling the camp altogether when it momentarily appeared that no one who was going knew how to cook in a Dutch oven. I guess there are people who believe that it's not really camping unless you're cooking in a Dutch oven. With all due respect, these people, in my considered judgment, are idiots. Dutch oven cooking is great, but *there are other ways of preparing food in the woods that don't involve hauling eleven tons of cast iron all over creation.*

Young Women's camp left Lucy and me with full run of the house. One of the errands we ran together was to the eye doctor to pick up Lucy's glasses. Lucy learned she needed glasses last month after failing the vision test necessary to receive her driving learner's permit. It's been fun to watch her experience the world anew through corrected vision. Everyone who's ever gotten glasses, I think, knows the euphoria of suddenly seeing clearly things that you hadn't previously realized were blurry. Watching it happen to Lucy might have been even more satisfying than going through it myself. (There's a fairly obvious gospel parallel here, but this letter already has enough church in it.)

Sam the kitten has been diagnosed as male by the vet and Lucy has begun introducing her to Ceres the goldendoodle. Sam seems afraid of Ceres (and of pretty much everything else) but Ceres seems more or less indifferent to Sam, and it looks like things might just work out.

Finally, Crystal's brother Rick (who lives in L.A.) spent a grand total of 20 hours in D.C. for work a couple of weeks ago and *still* found time to grab dinner and a selfie with us in Silver Spring. Someday I hope to reach Rick's level of commitment to family, but for now I'll just keep writing these letters.

Love, Tim, *et al*



Lucy can see!