

# THE FAMLET MONTHLY



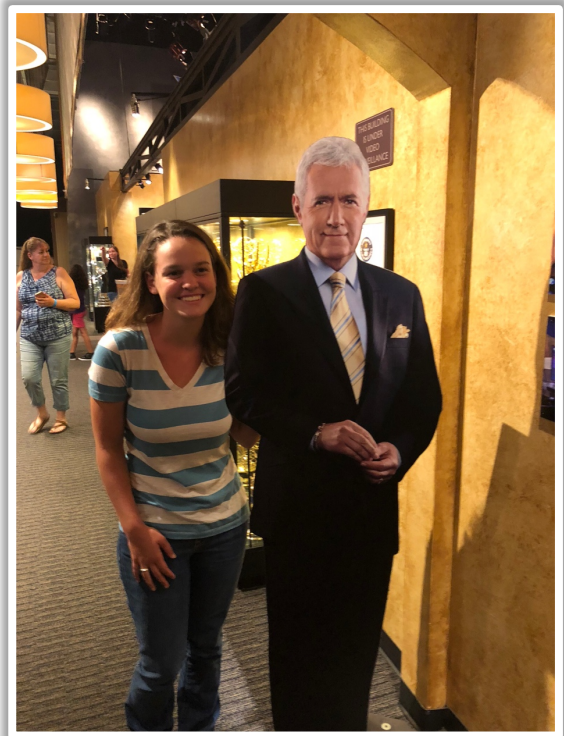
## Dear Family,

The girls and I swam in both the Atlantic and the Pacific this month. I can't immediately recall another month when that has happened. If it has, it's been a while. I am happy to report that I did not encounter a single plastic drinking straw in either ocean. This surprised me in light of recent reporting and advocacy.

Being a man and all, I tend to eschew drinking straws anyway. But I always appreciate the rare instances when the culture shifts toward something I'm inclined to do (or not do) anyway. It makes me feel a little less like a weirdo.

Our family's trip to the Pacific was occasioned by the bar mitzvah of my nephew Sidney Kent. For all practical purposes, my daughters have 24 first cousins. While overwhelmingly Latter-day Saint, this cohort also includes two Jews who live in Los Angeles, and Sid's rite of passage was a nice reason for a mini-reunion there with many members of Crystal's family.

It would be fair to say that Sid's family did a better job taking care of out-of-town bar mitzvah guests than we did with Hannah's wedding guests. After receiving our complimentary bar mitzvah gift bags a few hours after deplaning in L.A., the rest of the weekend included a Friday night dinner hosted by the grandparents followed by a Shabbat kick-off service (not technically what it's called) at Temple Akiba in Culver City, a Saturday-morning Shabbat service (during which most of the bar-mitzvah-related ceremony transpired), a



Sophie and (a cardboard cutout of) Alex Trebek. Culver City, Calif.

casino-themed Saturday night bash at the Elks Lodge complete with hora dancing and chair lifting, the most interactive DJ you've ever seen, an abundance of non-kosher food and two (count 'em, TWO) blackjack tables and dealers, culminating in a subdued Sunday-morning brunch.

The nearest Latter-day Saint meetinghouse was considerably closer to us than Temple Akiba, and so we tried to hit a sacrament meeting there before the Sunday brunch. But we quickly deduced from the presence of people directing traffic in the parking lot that we had landed on a stake conference. For the life of me, I couldn't (and still can't) think of a good reason to subject myself to any stake conference other than my own, and so I kept on rolling right out the back without stopping. No one in the car complained.

The upshot is that all the religion we got that weekend was in Hebrew, which falls into the same category as most human languages in that I don't understand any of it. I didn't get the sense that most of the people in attendance understood it, either, but that didn't seem to detract from the spirit of the proceedings. Sid was quite impressive in his reading of several extensive passages from the Torah and the Prophets in Hebrew. We all told him he did a great job, and I'm sure he did, though I'm not sure anyone but the rabbi and cantor would have known if he hadn't.

All in all, I had a nice time in shul, but I think I would have enjoyed it more if the building had been air conditioned.

L.A. greeted us with heat and uncharacteristically high humidity. Temperatures in the high 80s combined with dew points in the mid 60s felt like something of a respite compared to the 90-degree temps and low-70s dew points that we'd left behind in D.C. (Note to family members not familiar with how to talk about humidity: It's all about the dew point. Dew points in the mid 60s are tolerable as long as you're not exerting yourself or trying to sleep. The 70s are pretty miserable no matter what you're doing. Upper 70s, like my cousin Charlotte would have encountered in Orlando this month, pretty much make you wish you were dead.)

The difference is that people where we live (and in Florida) have air conditioning. This was not true of the 75-year-old, 1,016-sq-foot, 3-bedroom, 1-bath, million-dollar bungalow by the airport we rented on Airbnb for the week. The property description was upfront about



Above: Behind the scenes at *Jeopardy!*

Below: Sophie tries to make sense of her Uncle Rick's mysterious music-making machine.



the lack of a/c, but Crystal was convinced this wouldn't be a problem "because it's not humid in California." Neither of us slept particularly well all week, and I'll likely continue reminding her of this for the next 20 years or until she divorces me. (I exaggerated the value of the property. You can actually have it for just \$941,960.00, according to Zillow—so with a million bucks, you should have just enough left over to install a/c.)

Temple Akiba is conveniently located just a few minutes from Sony Pictures Studios, home to several popular TV shows including *Jeopardy!* and *Wheel of Fortune* (which record on stages next to each other). I've always been a *Jeopardy!* fan but with a *Wheel of Fortune* IQ. It would be the thrill of a lifetime to be on either show, but it will never happen because: 1) I'm not smart enough to be on *Jeopardy!*, and 2) while I am clearly smart enough to be on *Wheel* (me and anyone else with a 6<sup>th</sup>-grade education) and I'm certainly charming and handsome enough to pass the audition (just ask Mom) I would never have the nerve to do it for fear of saying something colossally stupid and becoming immortalized on YouTube for all the wrong reasons. And so we did the next best thing by watching three episodes of *Jeopardy!* from the studio audience. Sophie and Grace were afraid it would be boring. (Grace feels that *Jeopardy!* is to game shows what golf is to sports. She may be right about that—and golf is perhaps my favorite sport to watch, but I suspect she meant it pejoratively.) By the time things got started, however, they had to admit it was pretty awesome. Alex Trebek, two years older than Dad, still has a quick wit, looks great in makeup and is quite personable, chatting with and taking questions from the audience during breaks. I've pretty much wanted to be Alex Trebek my whole life—since long before he started hosting *Jeopardy!*. Mom likes to tell how I used to speak into a pretend microphone as a little boy, announcing myself as "Alice the Wreck" (which is what I thought his name was for a surprisingly long time). Clearly the ship has sailed on becoming him, but having seen him in person, perhaps I can now die in peace.

We spent the rest of the week on various beaches, visiting Hollywood (which was dumpier than I imagined), going to Sea World (for free, thanks to Crystal's Uncle Don, who is the President/CEO of the Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute), visiting the Getty Center (which is a gem), and hanging out with family.



Top: The Getty Center; Middle: The closest we got to the Hollywood Sign; Bottom: Our million-dollar home for the week.

The L.A. cousins are pretty cool, as you might expect. And nice. Sid carries his newly conferred manhood well. He tried to order a glass of Chardonnay at Rubio's, where we stopped for dinner after SeaWorld. When the guy at the counter wouldn't serve him, Sid retorted that it was okay "because I'm a Jewish man now." This only made the guy at the counter laugh at him, but Sid was unfazed. I don't really know anything about alcohol consumption, but I've never thought of Chardonnay as a particularly manly drink. He also might have been more convincing as a "Jewish man" if he hadn't just ordered the bacon and shrimp burrito, but I had to admire his chutzpah.

California is lovely. I understand why people are willing shell out so much dough to live there. If things don't work out for me here professionally (and since my dreams of being a game show host are shot) I think I'd like to move there and be either a beach lifeguard or a SeaWorld dolphin trainer. Those might not be the easiest jobs to get, but I think I'd be good at them.

Back home, we joined several other White Oak Ward families in Ocean City on Friday to round out our two-ocean month. The Mid-Atlantic surf was characteristically more docile than the Pacific waves we encountered in Southern California, but we nevertheless enjoyed playing in it, as we always do.

With Ironman Maryland fast approaching (five weeks from yesterday) and no place nearby in which to practice my open-water swimming (other than the Potomac, and I'm in no hurry to swim in that) I brought my wetsuit to Ocean City to train. I swam from a little north of 4<sup>th</sup> street down to the pier (where the big Ferris Wheel is) and back. The lifeguards weren't on duty yet, and so Crystal did her best to spot me and my neon green swim cap from the beach.

Swimming in the open ocean is exhilarating! I don't think I ever got more than a couple hundred yards from shore, but Crystal thought she saw marine animals of some sort porpoising near me. I ended up covering about 1.3 miles (according to my watch), which is a little more than half of the 2.4 miles I'll be swimming in the Choptank River next month. But the swim leg isn't what concerns me about Ironman. I'm not worried about the bike either—I've been riding over 200 miles per week for a while now and am probably in the best cycling shape I've ever been in. It's the marathon at the end that is most likely to do me in. Stay tuned.

Finally, our Maryland family got a little bigger with the arrival of my cousin (and pleasantly outspoken Rawlsian) Chris Henrichsen and his family from Las Vegas this month. Today we attended their ward in (appropriately enough) California, Maryland, where Chris's oldest son Todd gave his final sacrament meeting talk before departing on a mission to Quito, Ecuador, having deferred his acceptance to NYU film school to do so. He's an impressive fellow and we look forward to having his family nearby.

Top: Santa Monica Pier

Bottom: Bar Mitzvah Sid surrounded by his sister and almost exclusively female cousins

