

# THE FAMLET

## MONTHLY

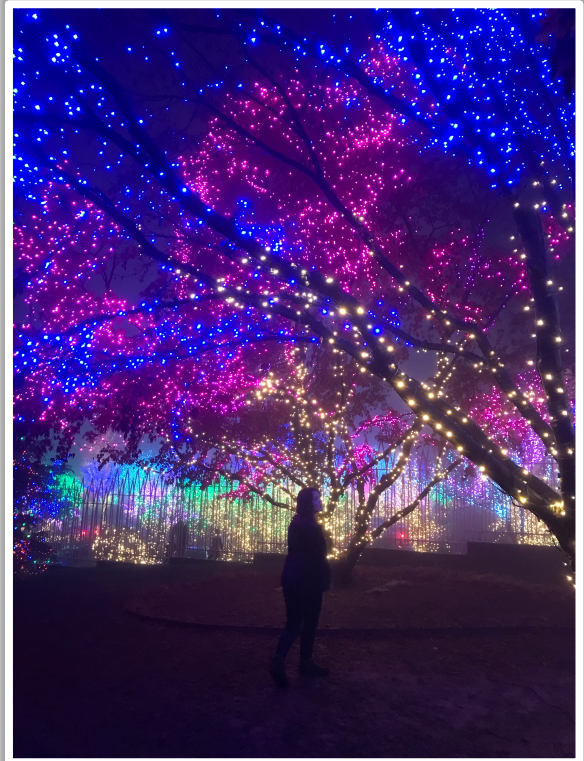


## Dear Family,

As I approach the end of yet another holiday season of mindless eating and subsequent self-loathing, I am reminded that one of my least desirable character traits is an apparent inability to do anything in moderation. I can abstain from cookies entirely or I can eat the entire plate, but I'm never content eating one or two. (It's fortunate I don't drink.) Similarly, there are things I care nothing about and things I obsess over but relatively few things in between.

I somehow managed to spend the first 46½ years of my life not knowing or caring what my blood pressure was. Ever since being told by my doctor in September that it was high, it has utterly consumed me. I measure it almost every morning. This morning it was 137/88. The average of my last 40 (yes, *forty*) readings is 132.6 over 85.7. I should probably send these to my doctor, but I already know what she will say. She will tell me that my hypertension is worrisome but probably not high enough to prescribe medication. She will tell me that I need to do a bunch of things I'm already doing and eat less of the foods I like.

To this end, for the past 100 days (up until Christmas at least, when I fell off the wagon) I have been recording virtually every scrap of food that I put into my body. (A side effect of this practice is that I've lost about 10 pounds because it renders eating so burdensome.) I have concluded from this exercise that there is simply no way I can be a happy person while keeping my daily sodium intake under 2,300 mg, and I



Grace admires the lights at the Washington DC Temple Visitors Center  
28 Dec 2018

don't know why I try. I'm not sure when I'll die, but I'm pretty sure it's going to happen.

Meanwhile, Sophie has picked a curious time of year to decide she's giving up sugar. I've unsuccessfully tried that myself about 10 different times, but Sophie generally exhibits more determination than I, and so she might actually succeed. Good luck, kid!

Lucy is still a vegetarian who doesn't like most vegetables. These days she appears to be subsisting on an intriguing diet consisting mostly of pasta sauce, starch, and sweets. I can't imagine that's healthful, but I don't know what to think anymore.

Meanwhile, no one in the house is playing more basketball these days than Crystal. Her dedication to this is such that she's even started cutting her fingernails short. I'm not sure whether this is to improve her ball handling or just because basketball playing tends to break long fingernails. She plays with a group of ladies at the Washington, DC stake center on Monday mornings. (Sometimes she rides her bike there since it's really no further than the stake center where our ward meets.) She doesn't feel like she's good enough yet to play with the more hard-core group of women who play at *our* building on Wednesday nights, but maybe someday.

I am not very good at basketball—I think for the same reasons I'm not good at dancing. I suppose that with focused and determined practice, I could probably learn to do either thing passably well, but if I'm honest I'd rather just watch TV.

Sophie has been taking a dance class at school and had a dance recital earlier this month. I drove there with Crystal and Lucy (I can't remember where Grace was) and was immediately discouraged by the traffic jam in the parking lot and the mass of humanity crowding into the school. Consequently, I shouted a few unkind things in the car at no one in particular, dropped Crystal and Lucy off at the entrance, and drove home. (Crystal and Lucy got a ride home with Sophie.) I'm told the recital was good. All I know for sure is that it was unacceptably long, though I'm sorry to have missed Sophie's two-minute part in it. I'm still accepting those Father of the Year nominations if it's not too late.

Earlier this month, Crystal and Sophie joined a bunch of other seminary students (and a few parents) in singing Christmas carols at 6:00 a.m. to bleary-eyed

Seminary students singing at Glenmont Metro - 7 Dec 2018



Grace and the Tri-M Music Honor Society - 13 Dec 2018



commuters entering the Glenmont Metro station. This was their contribution to the Church's #LightTheWorld campaign. There was some question as to whether Metro would permit this (buskers are routinely harassed by transit police for reasons nobody understands) but nobody gave them any trouble. It could be my imagination, but groups of people singing in random places seems to be a rarer and rarer occurrence nowadays. Sometimes we Christmas carol to people we don't know (or don't know well). They look at us like we're crazy. It's as though they can't even process what's happening. It would be a happier world if everybody sang more.

Speaking of singing, Grace was inducted as part of the Silver Spring International Middle School's inaugural Junior Tri-M Music Honor Society class. I don't really understand what that means, but I went to an event in which she was given a ribbon and certificate, and I took a picture. (I actually went and stayed to the end.) So there you have it.

We enjoyed being with JT and Hannah on Christmas. Their red-eye flight from Salt Lake got them into BWI at a little before 5:00 a.m. Sunday, which gave them just enough time for a short nap before our 9:00 a.m. sacrament meeting (which they partially slept through). Hannah used a note from her doctor to persuade Delta Air Lines that she requires an emotional support animal, and so their dog Sparks came along, too. Having a daughter who relies on such an animal to travel isn't likely to stop me from rolling my eyes at people who bring their pets onto airplanes, but I'll probably feel a little more guilty doing it in the future.

In addition to Hannah and JT, we were joined for Christmas by our longtime friends, Emily and Jon Eskelsen and their two children, who are Sophie's and Grace's ages. Spending time with the Eskelsens reminds me of a 1994 episode of *The Simpsons* in which Lisa befriends one Allison Taylor—the only student at Springfield Elementary School smarter than Lisa. While visiting Allison's home, Lisa learns that the Taylors are a family of intellectual heavyweights who amuse themselves by playing impossibly difficult games like trying to anagram a famous person's name into a description of that person—e.g., "Alec Guinness" = "genuine class." Lisa feels foolish when she draws a blank on "Jeremy Irons," but I bet *you* couldn't anagram that name into anything useful, either.

Willis cousins - 23 Dec. 2018



Hannah, JT, and the angel Sam Willis - 23 Dec 2018



Andrew, Alex, and Sophie Willis - 23 Dec 2018

(Really, you should just be impressed at the detail with which I can recall a television episode from a quarter-century ago.)

I only mention all this because the real Eskelsens remind me a little of the fictional Taylors. They go out of their way not to make you feel intellectually inferior to them, but there's just no getting around the fact that you are.

But we love them and the relationship has frequently worked to our benefit. This included the assistance Emily gave Hannah with SAT/ACT prep six years ago. The Eskelsens were our neighbors then (despite living in a different stake because of the ~~absurd, nonsensical~~, inspired way in which stake boundaries around here are drawn). Having helped ensure Hannah's acceptance to BYU, the Eskelsens spent the next five years in Germany before triumphantly returning to the area earlier this year. They're on the wrong side of the river now (in Fairfax, Va.) but still close enough for Emily to help Sophie prepare for the standardized tests she'll be taking in a couple of months.

We had Hannah and JT until early Christmas afternoon when they departed for Williamsburg to spend the rest of the holiday with the Embleys. They had to hurry back to Provo Friday morning in part so Hannah could begin a marathon series of shifts at the assisted living center where she works as a CNA. If all goes to plan, she will work 88 hours this week and 100 hours over eight days.

She seems to enjoy her work, even though she describes it as "like being a mother but having 30 unreasonable children who are twice your size." I think she's looking forward to becoming a real nurse three semesters from now. She was recently promoted to a position in which she will not have to deal with as much poop. She doesn't complain about the poop, but this seems like a positive development. Today was her first Sunday afternoon shift. She appreciated the guys who brought the sacrament around—she said it gave her a little moment to stand in the middle of the hall and feel peaceful.

I feel sorry for those of you who didn't get to see our kids' Nativity re-enactment at Grant and Jen's house last Sunday. It was epic.

I spent a fair amount of last month's letter complaining about cars' failing to yield to me in crosswalks (while running) and quite a bit of the October letter complaining about cars' hitting me on my bike. I am happy to report that in the 5 weeks since November's letter I have biked 356 miles and run 160 miles without incident. (I've also logged about 15 miles in the pool, but I don't worry much about cars there—except for this guy.) It makes me wonder what my blood pressure would be if I were more sedentary.

May you find peace and happiness in the new year.

Love,

Tim



Cars are a nuisance