



A Montana Merry Christmas 2016

I think we can all agree that 2016 was quite a year, politically. Thankfully our year as a family was not nearly as tumultuous.

Our biggest life-event was the birth of our first—and likely only—granddaughter, Josephine Rose. She was born on March 26, a little early, a little small, but a whole lot of cute. Cheryl is taking full advantage of only filling-in occasionally at Sunflower Montessori by spending as much time as possible with Josie and helping out Minnie.

Another life-event this year was Cheryl turning 60. We didn't have a big celebration for her, but it was still nice to have Cheryl join the almost-senior club, which at least means discounts on Snow Bowl lift tickets and movie tickets.

We did a little traveling this year. Cheryl and I traveled to Kansas City and the Lake of the Ozarks for some summer fun with the Wilsons and Abbotts. This fall we also met up with them in St. Louis for an Abbott wedding and a little sightseeing. This year I was able to make it to Glacier two times, completing four major hikes on my Glacier list and adding some photos to my Glacier collection. On the early morning return from my last trip I was thinking about how cool it would be to see a grizzly when all of a sudden I saw a grizzly standing in the road in front of me. I slowed to a stop as it crossed the road, taking a moment to remember that I had my camera in the passenger seat for just such an occasion. Once across the road it stopped and looked back as its cub clambered over the guard-rail rocks and scampered across the road. When they were reunited they seemed to pose for a picture before heading into the brush. Wow, so cool (and non-life threatening). This summer we also drove up the Thompson Falls Valley for a weekend of camping and paddling with our neighbors.

While Cheryl has been enjoying time with Minnie and the grandkids I spent the majority of my time working. I feel very fortunate that I can do most of my work in Missoula and from home. I did travel to Costa Mesa a few times—probably the easiest travel I’ve had—and had one trip to Princeton. Since I ended up working a whole lot more than I expected this year, in 2017 I am planning on working less and taking time off in chunks so that I can pursue more extensive adventures.

Travis left the Poverello Center at the start of the year as planned and recently found a new call center position at Missoula Aging Services. Minnie’s alone-time was cut short by Josie’s birth. Her time is pretty well consumed raising a bunch of babies—Josie; Abby, a chocolate Newfoundland puppy; Tiger, Milo’s kitten; and Lucy, Eliot’s kitten—as well as the rest of the household.

Milo is enjoying school quite a lot this year. He is again in the advanced program. This year they simulated a trip to Mars, where Milo was the Mission Specialist 2. Milo’s friend, Brady, is also in the program and he comes over occasionally to throw the football and hang out. Of course Milo still loves football, and we try to watch the Seahawks and Chiefs together when they are on television. Milo and I throw the football a lot, even in the snow, and Milo still walks around throwing up his football and pretending that he is making a slow-motion reception. Milo is also very diligent about taking care of “his” chickens.

Eliot is enjoying going to school with Milo on the bus, as well as all the rest of kindergarten. Eliot often surprises me when he spells out words and does math (even a little bit of multiplication). He’s gotten really good at finding words in a matrix of letters (like Boggle or Wordle). He spends a good deal of time being creative with building things, mixing potions, drawing and playing with his puppets.

We are excited that the whole family has started coming to our church on Sunday. We’re hoping that they will be able to connect with other families with kids and develop some strong relationships as a result.

This was a very big year for Brandon. He took off the month of July from work in order to take a long, extended trip to New York, Berlin, and Paris. Besides the travel, the primary purpose of the trip was to celebrate the wedding of one of his skater/artist friends, which he did at a location outside of Paris. This was not the type of trip many of us would take. Rather than staying in hotels, I think in all cases they stayed with people they knew. For us, the best part of his trip was that it was completed safely (i.e., no trips to the emergency room).

As usual, we had a nice visit with Brandon this Christmas. He was able to get a week off from his custodial work at KU to come out and spend time with us. By the end of the trip he was more than ready to get back to his life in Lawrence, which is still all about friends and doing art. He’s especially excited and focused on getting ready for an art show he will be putting on in February.

I am quite proud of the fact that I got through this whole letter without going hyper-political. A goal for me this year is to find a way to dialogue in a meaningful way that gets to the heart of the issues we face, without succumbing to the destructive partisanship that dominates so much of today’s political discourse. That being said, we hope that you found some measure of peace and blessing in 2016; that you had a Merry Christmas and holiday season; and that your 2017 will be filled with peace and joy.

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