



Happy Holidays 2013

A warm holiday welcome to you from (at the moment) a very chilly Seattle!

We start the year on a Chen family trip to San Diego, hitting SeaWorld, Legoland, and the San Diego Zoo. The girls love playing with their Chen and Tsai cousins.

One rainy winter morning, an ominous puddle grows in our garage. Water backing up from the sewage pipe eventually destroys our downstairs guest room. Our pipes apparently date to Roman times, and it takes the repair crew days to get everything straightened out. On the plus side, Angela ends up transforming a portion of the renovated guest room into her new home office.

Jan starts learning how to bake bread. This is great fun for him and the girls, who begin to develop a taste and appreciation for fresh bread.

We spend the school's midwinter break at Big White in Canada. Anya is fearless, Bree gains confidence, and Liya tries out snowboarding. She turns out to be a natural, and Jan compliments her on getting the hang of snowboarding in a single day. She breezily responds, "It's because I'm awesome."

Bree's favorite new activities are learning to read and doing KenKen puzzles.

Angela officiates at her first wedding, for friends Yuri and Aaron. January 2014 will mark two years since she began as an associate pastor at Mount Baker Park Presbyterian Church. The best part of her call? Meeting with friends for coffee! She's also started a blog at spiritualparentingpractices.blogspot.com.

We spend a touristy spring break in Vancouver, BC, a charming city that's so close, we wish we'd remember to visit it more often. One new place we visit is Capilano Suspension Bridge Park, with a deep river gorge and nice forest walk.

Jan: "Anya, why are there two — not one, but *two* — pairs of scissors on the floor of your room? That's dangerous!" Anya (on her bed, looking casually over the top of her book): "There aren't two." Jan: "Yes, there are two! Right there!" Anya: "No, there are not... There are *three*."

We celebrate our 15th wedding anniversary!

Angela has surgery to correct an issue with her jaw, and spends the next six weeks drinking smoothies through a straw.

Our sweet cat, Nutmeg, has surgery too — to remove some tumors. (Though her cancer will ultimately return, we're grateful for the extra time with her.)

Sabriya is allergic to dramatic tension. Jan takes her to a musical production of "Rapunzel" for ages 3–10, with characters in rainbow-colored outfits singing happy songs. But when one character disobeys an instruction, the looming consequences so overwhelm Bree that she and Jan leave halfway through the show. When Anya and Liya watch a movie in the family room, Bree sits at the top of the second floor stairs, peering between the stair risers at the far-away screen.

Spring events: Spring Concert; Bike to School day; piano recital; Anya's 5th grade field trip to Victoria, BC; Bree's preschool graduation; Liya's ballet performance.

With school out, we head to Japan for a three-week vacation. We reunite with friends in Tokyo, Yokohama, and some smaller cities. The Studio Ghibli anime museum on the outskirts of Tokyo is every bit as entertaining as the studio's movies. We stay with friends in Yokohama, who take us to a brilliant museum dedicated to ramen: the main hall reproduces a 1958 Japanese street where every other shop just happens to sell tasty ramen.

In the hot spring region of Hakone, we stay at a traditional inn with natural baths and long dinners. Liya and Anya sample of a few courses, the most memorable of which is "dried entrails of sea cucumber". At the Hakone Open-Air Museum, the kids climb inside huge, fantastical outdoor sculptures. Anya's saddened to realize that, if we ever return, she would be too old to be allowed on the sculptures.

In Kyoto, we tour several temples — the Kinkakuji "Golden Pavilion", the Ryoanji rock garden, and the "deer temple" at Nara — plus one that's new to us: Fushimi Inari Shrine. The girls aren't normally big on hikes, but when they see the shrine's long tunnel of closely set orange gates leading up a mountain, they go running through the gates all the way to the top.

We spend a day in Osaka at its famous aquarium and gawp at its massive tank of whale sharks. We spend our final nights at DisneySea, where the roller coasters and rides are just right for Anya and Liya (and, it must be said, their parents). Bree finds plenty of rides her own speed, and picks up a Little Mermaid costume she'll wear later in the year for Halloween. Throughout the trip, the girls' primary cultural focus is sampling the flavors of locally available "Hi-Chew" candies.

JANUARY



FEBRUARY



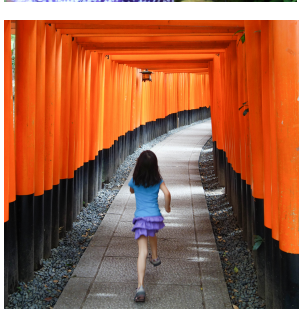
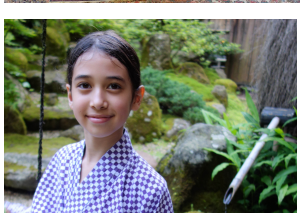
APRIL/MARCH



MAY



JUNE





JULY

Bree turns six! She celebrates by having a friend sleep over for the first time.

Anya and Liya take a week of “Chess and Fencing” camp. Apparently doing either of these activities all day would exhaust the kids, but the combination does not.

We camp for three nights at Ohanapecosh on Mt. Rainier, a magical place in the summertime. Jan’s mom, Lyn, joins us. So does his sister, Skye; she and her husband, Jared, are expecting their first child (a boy) in early 2014.



AUGUST

When our friends Owen and Nicole visit from New Jersey, we get to spend a fun week canoeing on Lake Washington, eating on Whidbey Island, visiting the Chihuly glass museum, and taking in the evening view from the Space Needle.

The girls convert the living room into a Potion Lab, where they mix various household substances together to see what happens. Research is concentrated in creating: 1) nice-smelling fragrances, and 2) lethal pesticides. One day, they hit upon one of the few mixtures of household products that’s genuinely chemically interesting: baking soda and vinegar in a closed Tupperware container. This, of course, explodes, sending spatters of white goop *everywhere*. They assist with the extensive cleanup, but this marks the beginning of the end of Potion Lab.



Jan and Liya go canoe camping. Jan’s finally heard about a place he’s long sought: a lake in Washington State where one can travel to campsites by canoe. Getting to Ross Lake entails backpacking, but Liya does great. We’re rewarded with a canoe trip on a long, serene mountain lake. We spend one night on a shore campground, the other on a tiny island. We paddle around the island with the intrepid Liya at the helm; she wants to try her hand at steering. After a minute of this, she observes, “Our trip around the island is going to be a bit wiggly.”



Our family goes back to Stanford Sierra Camp. The girls are ecstatic to reunite with camp friends, spending most of the week with them instead of us. The air is hazy all week long, as smoke from the huge Rim Fire at Yosemite National Park drifts through camp. Some outdoor activities are curtailed, but we still get in a hike to Azure Lake, and Jan makes a hike with a friend up Mt. Tallac. They get lost, but only for a little bit. While at camp, we celebrate Liya’s 10th birthday.



SEPTEMBER

Anya starts 6th grade (officially middle school), Liya starts 5th, Sabriya starts kindergarten. For the next three years, the girls will all attend the same school!

Kids’ activities resume: piano for all the girls, plus cello for Anya. Liya does rock climbing, and Bree, soccer. Anya enjoyed fencing camp so much she continues it, as well as trying debate. (Is improving a pre-teen’s debating skills unwise?)

Jan joins his brother Chris for a weekend at Yosemite. They hike to a spectacular view of Half Dome, and do a fun bike ride around Monument Valley.



OCTOBER

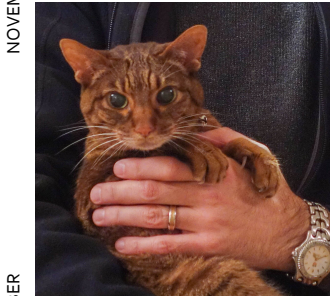
We discover one morning that Liya has drawn smiley faces on all the fruit again.

For Anya’s 12th birthday, she asks Jan to produce for her and her friends a puzzle hunt based on the anime films of director Hayao Miyazaki. His films often have natural settings, so the puzzle hunt crosses back and forth over Seattle’s Seward Park peninsula. A common Miyazaki theme is coming of age, so the 12 year-old girls travel without adults around the park’s biking loop and dense network of forest trails. When one team finds a tied bundle of nuts — an homage to the movie *Totoro* — the hungry girls *eat* the nuts before realizing the nuts were, in fact, a clue. But overall, the girls enjoy the challenges and have a fantastic time.



Angela attends her 20th Stanford reunion with Bree, staying with Angela’s cousin Tom and his wife Aline. Bree has great fun playing with cousins Laura and Jason.

For Lyn’s 70th birthday, Jan takes her to dinner at the Space Needle. When she sees Chris (who secretly came up for the occasion) at the table, she’s speechless.



NOVEMBER

Jan’s done various software projects this year, and adores working from home, but is considering starting something new. After our Japan trip, he’s also resumed studying towards a challenging Japanese proficiency test next year.

We all go down to San Francisco for Thanksgiving — by train! Lyn joins us for the journey, and when the train stops in Salem, OR, Skye and Jared board as well. We spend a pleasant weekend in S.F. with Chris and his girlfriend, Julie.

A sad day: our cat Nutmeg passes away. We miss her terribly.



DECEMBER

For Jan’s birthday, Anya gives *him* a puzzle hunt, sending him all over the house (and up to the backyard treehouse). The torch has been passed.

That’s about it for this year. Oh, and if you’d like to get our monthly journal via email, please let us know. Best wishes to you in 2014!