



Happy Holidays 2014

Another year has zoomed past!

New Year's finds us in California with an alumni group from Angela's Pasadena-based seminary to see the Rose Bowl parade and football championship.

Anya calls an emergency family meeting to discussing a pressing matter: WHEN are we going to get a hamster? Angela proposes the girls first demonstrate the ability to care for a living thing. She takes them to a gardening store, where each girl picks out a houseplant they will have to keep alive for six months. Anya later negotiates this down to two months ("I think it's pretty clear at this point that we can keep the plants alive."), but various factors delay the hamster acquisition.

On a mid-winter ski trip to Big White, BC, Bree starts doing blue intermediate runs, Liya spends half the week on a snowboard, and Anya tackles the mountain's double-black diamond "Cliff Chair".

At age six, Bree continues to avoid all dramatic tension. A scene in the movie *Happy Feet*, in which cute emperor penguin chicks are about to meet their mommies, causes Bree to run from the room.

The girls and Angela become addicted to the iPad farming simulation game *Hay Day*. All four get up early on weekends to plant wheat and trade goods.

We drive down to Salem, OR, to meet our new nephew/cousin, Leif, born in February to Jan's sister, Skye, and her husband, Jared. He's quite the little cutie.

Anya routinely leaves socks all over the house. Angela: "Anya! There's a dirty sock of yours *on the kitchen counter!*" Anya: "It's not dirty."

Jan launches his second startup, Component Kitchen, at a Google-sponsored event in San Francisco. The company's initial focus is creating a marketplace for "web components": pieces of web sites that can be combined to create apps. Searching for a programmer, Jan forms a partnership with his friend and ex-Microsoft colleague, Rob Bearman. The technology involved is so new, it's a fairly speculative venture. 2015 should be an interesting ride.

We've sometimes overlooked the attractions of the nearby San Juan Islands in Puget Sound, but this year we make a number of trips there. In April, Jan and Angela spend their 16th wedding anniversary on Lummi Island. Jan and Anya visit San Juan Island in May to see orca whales. The whole family (plus Jan's mom, Lyn) camps for a long July weekend on remote Sucia Island State Park. Anya shows off her bouldering skills on some limestone cliffs there while her parents anxiously look on. Anya's friend, Kaila, and her dad invite Anya and Jan to visit Obstruction Island in September. Jan takes Bree for an October weekend of biking and hiking on Orcas Island. During exceptionally long ferry waits, Jan tires of playing "Go Fish!", and teaches Bree to play Gin Rummy instead.

Anya accidentally attends her first fencing tournament. She arrives at her Saturday morning class to find an unexpected tournament beginning. Everyone assumes she's come to participate, so she's added to a group of kids who are about to compete. Anya says she probably wouldn't have come if she'd known about the tournament, but she's glad she did come.

We visit Jan's stepmother, Marlee, in Old Lyme, CT, and also have a chance to reconnect with Jan's stepbrother, Stephen, and the family of Jan's stepsister, Anne. Our girls are happy to spend time with Anne's children, Henry and Kate. The five busy themselves constructing a gigantic fort while the adults blather.

Our big family trip this year is to the Mediterranean...

Turkey: The girls discover they like Turkish apple tea, so we have fun shopping for some in Istanbul's labyrinthine Grand Bazaar. The girls are more interested in the city's plentiful stray cats than in museums or mosques. We have baths at a very old *hamam* bathhouse, where one can experience the odd sensation of having piles of soap bubbles poured all over one's body. Jan gets dragged onto the stage of a belly dancing performance, of which we thankfully retain no photos. We explore the ruins at Ephesus, and learn that no degree of historical importance can pique the girls' interest on a really, really hot day.

Greece: In the cute town of Monemvasia, the girls are more interested in the town's plentiful stray cats than its medieval fortress.

Malta: In the capitol of Valetta, a church called St John's Co-Cathedral doesn't look like much from the outside — but turns out to have been funded by Maltese sea pirates, who encrusted the inside with ornate, jaw-dropping decorations.

FEBRUARY JANUARY

MARCH

APRIL

MAY

MAY

JUNE

JULY



Italy: The hillside town of Taormina, Sicily, is beautiful —and has a gourmet popsicle store selling a wide selection of delicious fruit popsicles. The city of Rome has really cool drinking fountains, once a local shows you the trick of drinking from them. Even the monumental St. Peter's Basilica will fail to impress girls that have been first dragged through the Vatican Museums. The only Roman ruins that interest our girls are those populated by plentiful stray cats. Venice is a playground of alleys, bridges, and canals, where even a (boat) taxi ride to the airport can be magical. Bree may remember Venice all her life as the place where a gondolier sang her “Happy Birthday” on the day she turned 7.

Back in Seattle, the girls attend the usual array of weeklong summer camps. Liya: “Where’s Sabriya?” Parent: “At science camp since 8:30 a.m. You’ve been home all day and didn’t notice?” Liya: “So that’s why it’s been so quiet.”

AUGUST



Liya and Bree do one out-of-the-ordinary camp: a horseback riding camp in California, spending the week with their uncle Johnny and aunt Zenni.

Jan (re)discovers the joys of backpacking. Reading an account of a man who hiked the long-distance Pacific Crest Trail, Jan decides that in 2016, he wants to hike the 500-mile portion of the PCT that crosses Washington. Within an easy drive of our home there are a dizzying number of great backpacking destinations, many of which we’ve never even heard of, much less visited. Jan starts training with a 3-day solo trip to Spectacle Lake in Alpine Lakes Wilderness. All goes well.

For the third year, we spend a week at a family camp near Lake Tahoe. This year, the girls try water skiing, and Anya turns out to have a knack for it.

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A new school year begins: Anya begins 7th grade, Liya moves up to the middle school for 6th, and Bree starts 1st grade. Next year will be Anya’s last in the K-8 school, so we begin taking her to open houses at some local high schools.

After many months of waiting, the girls finally get a Djungarian dwarf hamster. She’s pretty darn cute. The girls construct a series of cardboard obstacle courses for her. The hamster’s skill at negotiating these earns her the name Kouri, from “parkour”: an urban sport of leaping over obstacles.

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Jan takes the annual Japanese Language Proficiency Test (日本語能力試験) to motivate his Japanese studies and check on his progress. He tries Level 2, advanced intermediate, but the prep materials have woefully underrepresented the test difficulty. Many adults have a nightmare: “I’m back in college taking an exam, but I have no idea what I’m doing. And I’m naked.” This perfectly captures the test experience, with the only difference that Jan gets to wear clothes.

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SEPTEMBER



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