

# Happy Holidays 2015



JANUARY

FEBRUARY

MARCH

APRIL

MAY

JUNE

While the days may sometimes go by slowly, the year still seems to fly past.

Our year begins with an unusually warm and dry winter. Angela's brother Johnny comes up from L.A. to take his sons Anthony and Brian sledding. We enjoy their visit, but there's no snow for them! A few weeks later, we go to Whistler, BC, to ski over mid-winter break. There's a little snow at the top, but for the first time in local memory, the lower halves of both mountains are bare.

Liya occasionally publishes a newspaper featuring stories about — and ostensibly by — the house's large collection of round stuffed "Squishable" animals. One issue announces that the animals will hold an art show featuring tiny artworks. Liya prints tickets, holds a ribbon-cutting ceremony, and guides a tour through an extensive collection. Angela produces a suitable art show dinner with hors d'oeuvres and sparkling apple juice in champagne flutes. The tour exits through a gift shop where animal artworks can be purchased at reasonable prices.

Liya's Humanities class performs an adaptation of "To Kill a Mockingbird". She plays the courthouse bailiff, and a challenging devil trying to sway a juror.

Sabriya still loves sewing. Our friend, Siri, comes over for a series of visits to show Bree how to design, cut, and sew a skirt and a dress from whole cloth.

Jan is pleasantly surprised to learn he passed the grueling Japanese language test he took in 2014 to check his progress. (He takes it again in December 2015.)

Anya's 7th grade does a weeklong trip to Monterey and San Francisco. She's been away from home before, but this trip involves less adult supervision and more best friends. Not to mention teaching these friends to play Texas Hold 'em...

Anya and Liya save up allowance money for a giant octopus beanbag. Jan finds it blocking a door, and asks why it's in the way. Anya corrects him: "The giant octopus is never *in the way*. The giant octopus is always *a welcome surprise*."

Over spring break at Angela's parents' house in Virginia, Jan spends the week in bed with a cold. Angela drags the girls to attractions in DC: the National Museum of Natural History, the Lincoln Memorial, the Jefferson Memorial, the National Museum again (at Anya's insistence), the Spy Museum, and Mt. Vernon. We reconnect with our friends Ben and Katherine, who live in Alexandria with their children Quentin and Georgia. Anya has fun hypnotizing Quentin.

The second year for Jan's company, Component Kitchen, includes typical startup ups and downs. He and his partner Rob land a nice but too-short contract with Google. One highlight of the year is a bit of shuttle diplomacy in which Jan resolves a long-standing grudge between engineers at Apple and Google over an obscure technological point. When the dust settles, it transpires that Jan's named a new piece of the web's standard HTML programming language.

Anya likes to go to her favorite ramen restaurant and snack on red pickled ginger. It's supposed to be a condiment, but she eats piles of it. Whenever the staff see her come in, they send over a plate with a huge mound of red ginger.

The girls do a Mother's Day high tea at our house. Anya helps find ingredients like clotted cream, while Liya and Bree shop at the local market and make currant scones from scratch. Each girl prepares a different type of finger sandwich: cucumber, carrot salad, peanut butter and jelly. They stack plates and glasses to simulate tiered high tea serving trays. They clear the dining table, create a flower centerpiece, and lay out the tablecloth and place settings. The high tea is a hit! Would that every meal were so collaborative.

Anya plays Demetrius in a class production of Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream". She's supposed to lie asleep on the stage while Oberon and others deliver speeches, but Anya steals the scene by snoring loudly.

The girls watch a competitive cooking show called "Cupcake Wars", inspiring them to bake many varieties of cupcakes. We are okay with this.

Angela wraps up 3½ years working as an associate pastor at Mt. Baker Park Presbyterian Church. She feels this is a good time to find a new church with a larger youth program for our girls. Congregations generally don't give an ovation when a pastor finishes a sermon, but on her last day, Angela's congregation rewards her with one anyway.

Jan does a series of 10 backpacking trips this year to train for his planned 500+ mile hike across Washington State's Pacific Crest Trail in summer 2016. The hikes are generally 2–4 days, and span a variety of conditions, from the breathtaking Palouse Canyon in Eastern Washington's desert to the foggy and remote Olympic Coast. Getting in shape is part of the goal, but so is figuring out



what ultralight hiking gear strikes a good balance of weight and comfort. Some hikes are solo; others are with good friends and family: Derik, Jared, John, Ben, Lyn, even a fun hike each with Liya and Bree (who do great!). Jan's posted photo highlights from this year's hikes at [miksovsky.com/2015/backpacking](http://miksovsky.com/2015/backpacking).

Bree gets a birthday puzzlehunt for her and her friends to solve. Our house's increasingly numerous stuffed octopuses celebrate Bree's 8<sup>th</sup> birthday with a set of 8 puzzles themed on the number 8 (musical octaves, say). And while everyone knows an octopus can produce ink, few know they can also make *invisible* ink. Each of the 8 clues reveals a magnetic puzzle piece showing a smiling octopus. Bree's group figures out that they need to snap the pieces together, but the real trick is realizing they need to form a three-dimensional octahedron to read the puzzle's Happy Birthday message. Bree receives a sewing machine gift from her relatives, and she's soon buried our upstairs loft in sewing projects.

We visit New Jersey to celebrate the joyful wedding of Angela's cousin, Albert, and his fiancée Maggie. We reunite with distant branches of the Chen family, and also enjoy an afternoon with our friends Owen and Nicole. Jan meets up with his brother Chris and stepbrother Stephen to visit Jan's stepmother, Marlee. She moved to an assisted living home late last year after being diagnosed with a form of dementia. It's a terrible disease, but for the visit at least, Marlee's still in many ways recognizably her old self.

We spend a week in Tokyo, where Jan finds his reading skills have improved in practice, not just test-taking theory. Liya, it turns out, also learned a bit of the Japanese katakana alphabet before the trip, and she's delighted to decode signs and menus. We have a nice time with our friends Kei and Mayuko and their two young sons. We see some new tourist attractions (the Tokyo SkyTree) and some old ones (the Studio Ghibli museum). Liya and Bree get hooked on a Japanese iPhone game called Nekoatsume, amassing a cute virtual backyard full of cute virtual cat toys in order to attract cute virtual cats. We have a memorable meal at a hot spring in Shuzenji that includes an amazing corn tempura. The girls are amused to see this item listed on the menu as, "Fried Cone".

As the main focus of the summer, the girls take a one-month intensive Mandarin class in Taipei, Taiwan. Our Taiwanese relations arrange for a nice apartment in the popular Yongkang area. A key apartment feature is its air conditioning, a requirement for Taipei's sultry summers. It's typhoon season, too: a big typhoon blows right through the city. The apartment is a short walk from the Mandarin school offered through National Taiwan Normal University (師大), where the girls make new friends from other countries. During the month, we reconnect with Ike, Penny, Leslie, Eddie, Allen, and many other relatives. After Jan heads back to Seattle for work, Angela's parents come to stay. Before leaving Taiwan, the girls insist on traveling all the way down to the southern tip of the island so they can revisit a waterpark hotel they loved so much on a previous trip.

While the rest of the family is in Taiwan, Jan and his brother Chris go backpacking for a week along the rugged High Sierra Trail in Sequoia National Park. The 72-mile trail includes a challenging summit of Mt. Whitney, the highest point in the continental United States. Over the week, they befriend a number of other hikers, who refer to Jan and Chris as "the ultralight brothers".

We end the summer at Stanford Sierra Camp at Fallen Leaf Lake, CA. Anya's teen group does an overnight trip in Desolation Wilderness. Even the gear she borrows from Jan is hardly enough to keep her warm during the very cold night.

The school year begins. Sabriya starts 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, Liya 7<sup>th</sup>, and Anya 8<sup>th</sup>. Since it's Anya's last year at the K-8 school, she and her classmates begin a long season of high school open houses, interviews, tests, and application essays.

Jan has a quick but enjoyable trip to Amsterdam for a conference. He has fun pedaling a rented bike along the dikes, canals, and narrow streets.

Anya's ultimate frisbee team flies to Winnipeg, Canada, for an annual tournament called "Hold Back the Snow". Anya's team competes with a dozen other teams, and manages to take 1<sup>st</sup> place! This is the first time her school has won the tournament in many years, so the team is very happy.

We spend the long Thanksgiving weekend with Jan's family at Suncadia in Eastern Washington. Jan's mom, brother Chris and his girlfriend Julie, and sister Skye and her family are there as well. The girls are especially excited to spend time with their cousin, Leif, now 21 months old. Leif enjoys having his cousins chase him around, make silly faces, and read to him.

Merry Christmas to you, and a Happy New Year in 2016!