

# Happy Holidays 2025



JANUARY



While Liya's home for winter break, she gives skiing lessons to Evrim, the family friend we're hosting during her leave of absence from Brown. Evrim's a quick study, and by the end of day one is taking a chair lift and doing green runs.

One morning Liya puts water in a kettle to boil. She explains that one must help the kettle know how to make the proper sound. She leans over it, encouragingly, making an increasingly high-pitched whine: "eeeeeeeeeeeeEEEEE!".

FEBRUARY



We do a ski trip of our own up to Whistler, BC. We don't have great snow, but the village is still fun and the views from the Sea to Sky Highway are stunning.

Bree spends her winter long weekend in the Washington, D.C., area with Jan and Angela's parents. Bree and Jan explore the city's museums. Bree's American Studies history teacher makes extensive use of historical paintings in his class, so at the National Gallery of Art we walk through the American wings hunting for paintings she recognizes; Jan enjoys her commentary. We have good weather for a walk with Angela's parents along the Potomac at Great Falls National Park.

Jan organizes a surprise dinner party for Angela's birthday at The Herbfarm restaurant in Woodinville. It's been ages; the 4-hour dinners are still fantastic.

For his senior spring break, Evan heads with friends to Wales. As they're flying over the Arctic, an airport fire breaks out at Heathrow, forcing the flight far off course to Washington, D.C. Evan's grandparents are delighted by another grandchild visit. Evan and friends eventually reach Wales for a peaceful vacation.

Angela has been encouraging her congregation in expanding spiritual practices. Beyond Bible Study, prayer, fellowship, and worship, there's also celebration, sabbath, solitude, silence...Shh! Leave her alone!

Jan and Evan both start learning a little Czech to prepare for our summer vacation. Jan's app lessons include vocabulary unlikely to be useful to a tourist, like a unit on farm animals, but they do finally get to important phrases like "Potřebujeme kávu": *We need coffee*. Czechia is sadly resource-poor when it comes to vowels: "krk", "prst", "trh", "vlk", and "z" are all common Czech words.

Angela, Evrim, and Jan have a nice long weekend on Whidbey Island, exploring the town of Langley and stopping to see the vivid blooms of the Tulip Festival.

We go to New Haven for Liya's graduation from Yale. Her four years have flown by! For some reason there are four different graduation ceremonies, most of which include a fair degree of pomp and one of which involves very silly hats. Bree's school is just the next town over, so she's able to join too.

Jan and his brother Chris make a 6-day, 300-mile, biking adventure along the Palouse to Cascades Trail, from Rattlesnake Lake in North Bend to Spokane in eastern WA. Half the scenery is varied and beautiful; the other half entails monotonous wheat fields as far as the eye can see. In places the trail reverts to the original railroad rock bed, nearly impossible to bike on. High points: a 2.3-mile tunnel; meeting a horseback club riding the trail with covered wagons.

Bree returns home for the summer. Jet lag wakes her early, and she eats a breakfast of Beecher's Flagship cheese and Triscuits while sitting on the floor. "What?" she says. "Have you never partaken of Mouse Breakfast before?"

Because Evan took a gap year, he graduates this year as well, and we all gather in Palo Alto for the ceremonies at Stanford, where we're joined by Angela's parents. Stanford's graduation is lighter on the pomp and has even sillier outfits. We all enjoy a graduation party with the extended family of Evan's good friend, Yayo.

Both graduations complete, we begin a two-week trip to Czechia — our first family trip since the pandemic. We start with a couple of days in Vienna, Austria. One highlight is the hedge maze at Schönbrunn Palace, which is as fun as all hedge mazes are. A less-than-highlight is Plachutta Wollzeile, a restaurant famous for its boiled beef entrees, which are as tasteless as all boiled beef is.

We stop in Brno, home to an excellent museum about the Roma people, a charming cat café called Schrödinger, and a city hall with a free paternoster elevator. This is a continuously moving vertical conveyor belt of open compartments — distinctly unsafe but nevertheless extremely fun to ride.

We spend most of the trip in Prague and its environs, reuniting with Jan's aunt Hela (very old but still sharp), her son Ivo and daughter Mirka, and their extended families. These family reunions are liberally doused with Czech beer. We make many tourist excursions, one to a Czech folk costume museum in the countryside with such interesting exhibits that Bree doesn't want to leave. We

MARCH



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JULY



AUGUST



SEPTEMBER



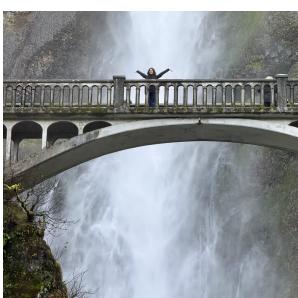
OCTOBER



NOVEMBER



DECEMBER



also make a side trip to the small town of Děčín near the border, where we make an adventurous hike to a stone tower atop the Snežník plateau; we also do a long e-bike ride down the Elbe River to Germany and back. Bree's nervous about riding an e-bike but likes it so much that she zooms far ahead and out of sight.

Our cat Mojo is wonderful but stupid. When we pour cat kibble from a bag into a plastic canister, Mojo hears the noise and comes running to get kibble. He will do this even if he is *already in the process of eating kibble elsewhere*. Mojo often antagonizes his brother Moxie, who spends summertime outdoors to get peace.

Evan orchestrates a series of outings to summer cultural events, including the Indian Days Powwow at the Daybreak Star center and the Obon Festival in the International District. Both events are new to us and worth seeing.

Bree and a friend visit a Lego store, where Bree fondly recalls assembling earlier editions of various Lego Friends sets: a café, a pet shop, etc. She notices the store sets no longer include a sloped cash register piece; it's been replaced by a little credit card terminal with a "Tap to Pay" icon. For the first time, Bree feels old.

Jan takes Bree, Liya, Evan, and Evrim backpacking for two nights in Mount Rainier National Park. We luck out with good weather and snag a perfect campsite on Upper Crystal Lake surrounded by a bowl of alpine peaks. On the middle day we hike over a ridge to the Pacific Crest Trail and follow it to Crystal Mountain ski resort. On the way back, Evrim spots a large canine loping through a valley meadow far below us. We're pretty sure it's a wolf; we're lucky to see it.

At the end of the summer, the young adults depart for their respective schools. Bree starts her senior year at Choate and serves as a resident adviser in her dorm. Evrim returns to Brown University for her junior year; she used her time with us to design a new major studying film, philosophy, and literature. Evan leaves for Taiwan for a master's program in public health at National Taiwan University (臺大) in Taipei. Liya starts a master's program at University of British Columbia in Vancouver, joining a lab her Yale mentor started to study viruses as a model organism for evolution. The house is now too quiet.

In late September, Jan flies to Hiroshima and then makes his way north to Tokyo. He rents a bike for a ride of the Shimanami Kaido, a popular cycling trail that runs from the main island of Honshu to the island of Shikoku, crossing a necklace of smaller islands linked by soaring suspension bridges. He stops to visit tiny Naoshima, an island home to several art museums, some interesting and some weird: one is so popular it requires a reservation but it's just a windowless black chamber where one sits in complete darkness for ten minutes. Jan's happy to reunite with a number of friends for meals and a hike.

Jan also meets a Japanese web designer who wants to try the site design tools that Jan is developing. Jan's never given a technical demo in Japanese before, so it becomes an opportunity to learn a lot of new vocabulary.

Angela attends an invitation-only pastor's conference called CREDO for a week in Little Rock, Arkansas. Restorative, grounding, connecting — everything she needed. Praise God for new experiences, new colleagues and friends!

We visit Choate for Parents Weekend, following Bree through her busy class schedule, then heading to Rhode Island for a short vacation. We stop in Providence to attend a No Kings protest and to pick up Evrim from Brown. The four of us spend several restful days poking around the town of Newport.

Evan is now 24, Liya is 22, and Bree is 18. For Evan's birthday we send him a care package of hot sauces. Evan puts hot sauce on many foods, routinely carrying a bottle with him when he goes out. He may pick a sauce to bring based on where he's going to eat, or select a cuisine based on what sauce he's carrying.

This year we've gotten involved with a local neighborhood group. The group started a farmer's market near our house (yay!). We also help with a neighborhood cleanup day, and Jan joins its committee on zoning changes in hopes he can encourage acceptance of denser housing in our area.

For Thanksgiving we gather with Jan's family at a large house in Hood River, Oregon. We enjoy the holiday dinner, walks around the cute town, a day hike to a bluff overlooking the Columbia River, and a stop at scenic Multnomah Falls. Bree finishes the week with a flurry of work on college applications.

All three children will be home for the holidays!