

Merry Christmas

Another Covid year has come to an end. Another year where Amy asked me to start the letter in October so that you might have received it prior to Christmas... However, this year's letter was a little hard to get started, mostly because the start of the year was so forgettable. We didn't do any of the things we've done in past years. No Broncos games in January (becoming the new normal), no St. Patrick's Day parade, no shows at the Arvada Center, no Spring break. That leaves work, school, online Supper Club (where we learned how to play "Among Us"), house stuff, weight gain, and ... sleep. Good times to start year 2 of "The Covid". We did get vaccinated in the spring; not sure that would normally count as a highlight, but the bar was pretty low this year. So I'll skip ahead a bit to some things we did get to do.

We did get a chance to take a few vacations this year. Our first vacation was to Las Vegas at the end of the school year with our friend Kim. The casinos were open, but there were no live shows, so we had to find alternative entertainment. Some of the places we went were Meow Wolf (immersive art), Ethel M (chocolate and amazing cactus garden), I Love Sugar (Martini bar- what an experience!), and Jerry's Nugget (local casino). Meow Wolf is a large indoor space designed by a collection of artists (our brother-in-law, Bob, worked on the one in Denver). Once inside there are no maps, so you just walk about. There's also a mystery going on in the background, which is there to keep you coming back. We spent most of the time exploring. One thing we discovered was an interior room that had strobe lights and a camera. The camera would periodically take a snapshot of the room and display it - never would have guessed how entertaining that could be. It was like being in the old Beastie Boys music video, "Intergalactic" (conveniently still available on YouTube). We did a few outdoorsy things and then headed to Jerry's Nugget casino, a special treasure north of Fremont Street. In case you haven't heard of it, well, neither had we. What brought us there was the prospect of a \$3 craps table, but what we found was so much more. Our first stop was the diner, which had an eclectic menu longer than our Christmas letter. The food was delicious and the desserts were even better. Next, we ventured into the casino where you could hear the sound of coins dropping into a set of vintage slot machines in the corner. The first thought is "That can't be real. Nobody carries cash any more, much less change. My wallet hasn't seen a coin in this century." However, it was the real thing, a slot machine being fed coins by a chain-smoking retiree. What more could you ask for except a \$3 craps table? We did find the table but, initially, the prospect of playing looked slim. There was a single table with plenty of locals crowded around. Kim and I parked ourselves at an empty table to recall the rules. As we discussed how to lose our money in the slowest way possible, other players gathered around the table, as well. As luck would have it, we arrived right as the second table was opened. We positioned ourselves to be able to roll the dice first and almost immediately started getting advice from another player. He wasn't betting on any of this advice, just offering it for free to us. Once the dice came to us, we made a point and started rolling to get the point. During a roll one of the dice leaped off the table, bounced off one of the staff, and fell back on the table. The number came up 7, not such a great thing in craps, which means we lost. Not just us, most of the locals at the table lost, as well. To us that was just statistics (Kim is an excellent middle school Math teacher), but to the locals the roll had been manipulated and should not have counted. The bad roll was clearly someone's fault. Thankfully it was not us, instead it was blamed on the staff and they were clearly bad luck! Apparently superstition is a much easier explanation than statistics. Of course, if statistics were better understood, all casinos would be empty. Anyway, we played long enough to lose half our money and called it a day, but we'll definitely remember it fondly.

Immediately after returning from Las Vegas we got in the car and took a road trip to Flaming Gorge and Dinosaur National Monument, travelling with our friends, William and Christie. In transit, the best description would be that they drove the getaway vehicle and we drove the decoy. Eventually, we did end up in the same places. We scheduled a boat ride on Flaming Gorge reservoir which is amazing! Upon arrival we received an extensive 1 minute training video to earn our boating qualifications. The summary being here's forward, here's reverse, don't go too far, and don't run into anything. The reservoir turned out to be a wonderful perspective of the landscape and we brought the boat back in one piece, despite Amy driving without taking the training! Our next stop was Vernal, UT; local temperature - TOO HOT - it was like we were in Las Vegas again. We went out for a hike along the way and found some dinosaurs, preserved in stone along a lake bed. Luckily, we didn't fall in. We also went to the dinosaur exhibit at the Monument, as well as the Field Museum in town. Both were well worth the visit. The museum even had a Pre-Cambrian (aka really old) rock. You couldn't pick it up and throw it in the air, but you could touch it, which was pretty cool. We also spent an evening star gazing along the Green River. We found a dark spot to observe the stars right next to the river, but unfortunately, there was already a haze forming from the Oregon forest fires, at least that's what we told ourselves. It could also have been an internal haze from our aging eyes or aging minds. Colorado is also now known for producing a special kind of smoke, but it wasn't that type of vacation.

I spent much of the summer playing golf at Haystack. It's a golf course tucked between 2 urban areas that has a very secluded feel. Unfortunately, the course was bought by developers and closed in the fall. The course was very casual, including the maintenance. I enjoyed playing, taking lessons, and having an occasional adult beverage. Since its closing I've realized it was also a very isolated course. There were no man-made obstacles lingering about, like houses, cars, or pedestrians.

Amy's big project over the summer was to help the family get her mom's house ready to sell. Her mom has been living in an adult community since the pandemic began and Hattie (our niece) and her family had been living there to save up to buy their own home. Let's just say that it wasn't the most fun way to spend a month, but after monumental efforts by Lisa and her family, the house was ready to go on the market and luckily sold right before Thanksgiving. What a blessing!

Amy's Kindergarteners were lucky enough to be able to partake in the ULA/Ball Aerospace student rocket launch program again this year, despite all of the restrictions going on. Her class created "Fly Like an Eagle - aka as a Hawk" an experiment in wind velocity. They didn't win the grand prize but the kids did get to experience the Space Foundation Museum, the Garden of the Gods, and a wonderful day at the launch. The only drawback, due to loss of revenue from the previous year, hotel rooms were astronomical. Who knew you could spend so much for just a few hours' sleep in the fabulous metropolis of Pueblo, CO?

We took one more road trip before the start of school to the family reunion in South Dakota. We enjoyed the time spent with everyone and wished it could be longer. There are so many people it's hard to get a chance to visit with everyone. With all the activities going on, one of these days we might need a Daktronics scoreboard to keep track.

School started for Amy in person this year. Last year's online class was combined back into two in-person classes, so her class size went from 16 to 26. Despite all of the restrictions they have been able to return to a bit of normalcy like going on a field trip. It has been a hard year for the kids as most of them truly haven't been in a school setting before. Amy tries to make it as fun as possible and found they especially like making crafts. One of the projects for Thanksgiving was creating a turkey made from tracing your hand. One of the student's didn't get the hand completely cut out before the end of the day; they were only able to cut out 1 finger and left it pointing up from the table (it was not the thumb). Since they are Kindergarteners it's unlikely they were aware of the significance, but you never know what they may have learned online. It's kind of how the year is going... She LOVES her class but, due to circumstances outside of anyone's control, it has been a challenging year (more so than any other), and as they kids now like to say, "We are all on the struggle bus today".

Speaking of learning, I learned Amy's birthday is the 3rd day of September, not the 4th. She kept telling me how she wanted to do certain things on Friday (her birthday) and I kept thinking well, that's not your birthday because it's on Saturday. I even went so far as to ask her Friday evening what she would like to do for her birthday tomorrow. That didn't go as well as expected, as I didn't arrive home from work until after 7pm. In the future I'll consult the calendar and maybe listen closer. Although we did celebrate our 20th year of marriage this year (can you believe it?), listening intently can be a challenge even at this point in our lives.

We attended 3 Broncos games this season. Let's just say the opposing team's fans had a much better time than we did at all three games (Raiders fans are so unbearable when they finally **win** a game!). Watching the Broncos this year reminds me of how I play golf, consistently inconsistent. We look like a team stuck in the middle. The good news for us, the weather was fabulous at each game. The bad news for Mother Earth, where is the much needed moisture? As I pen this letter so close to Christmas it is 65 degrees in Denver!

We also attended Meow Wolf in Denver with our Supper Club. It was a different experience than in Vegas and it was also a great time with our friends. If you get a chance - go check it out!

We were invited to Kim and Scott's awesome Halloween party and the theme was rock or rocky or something like that (I wasn't really listening...). Many wore costumes from the *Rocky Horror Picture Show*; we went with a different interpretation. It is said that we will be known as the "plastic people" due to the sedimentary layer of plastic we will leave behind as our legacy. That inspired us to wear plastic bags with an assortment of plastic attachments we found located throughout our house. Turns out it's not a difficult costume to assemble at the last minute and everyone was impressed that we didn't show up in our traditional M&M costumes!

Over Thanksgiving we took a trip to Avila Beach, CA. It's one of our favorite places to visit in the off season. The beach is quiet, the weather is warm, and there are lots of outdoor places to explore. One of our discoveries on this trip was the local "clothing optional" beach - no warning from Google about that! We also thought about kayaking in the ocean. Some locals described an Avila Beach kayak video on YouTube that we should take a look at. Not to spoil the video, but if a lot of small fish start jumping out of the water all around the kayak, PADDLE! After watching the video, we are going to stick to Morro Bay for the kayaking on our next trip.

In between adventures work at Seagate was busy this year. We lost about half our team this year for various reasons, including someone I had been working with on a new product. We were told by the product manager to over-communicate because most communication was being done remotely. My teammate was good at that. I, on the other hand, have never been accused of over communicating about anything (except maybe this letter) so we made a good team while it lasted...

We were able to do a few "normal" things this year like trivia this summer (outdoors), going to shows and football games in the fall, Amy getting her toenail removed AGAIN (not because of me this time, thank goodness), and attending a Christmas party. Another familiar thing happened with graduate school, I dropped out - again. Among other things, the time demand was too much. I still have the option to go back in the spring, but that doesn't sound very appealing to me. Look at all the time I have now on the weekends to write the Christmas letter, torture our very old kitty, Kami, by trying to remove her endless fur knots, and do yard work! I also have been enjoying hearing Amy learn how to play the ukulele through a program called *Guitars in the Classroom*, which offers free lessons for teachers to teach kids how to play an instrument (along with great ideas of how to teach content through music). Kids need the Arts, and sadly, many schools can no longer support this important part of learning due to budget cuts and other circumstances.

Our year has come to an end (and so has this letter). We hope you were able to stay healthy and that health continues going forward into 2022. May the peace of Christmas and the prospect of a new year filled with adventures and good health be a gift to you and yours.

Here's to the best New Year ever!

Amy & Royce

