

Merry Christmas, friends and family!

Well, another unusual year has come and gone. 2021 was filled with fun times. There's also an air of "good riddance" about it as well.

Fun times: both Kaitlyn and Aubrey got to go to Snow Camp with the church. Apparently, freezing is fun when you're with friends. But not if you're walking to school. Don't they appreciate that we had to walk through blizzards all winter long as kids, uphill both ways?

We did have fun freezing when we visited the Dillon Ice Castle. I was picturing people running around in sequined dresses, singing "Let it Go," but none of that happened. However, they do have ice slides, which are a pretty slick way to travel (had to hit you with a groaner early). On that same mini-vacation, we visited the Colorado School of Mines Geology Museum. It rocked. The girls also got to see where we first met (the dorms at Mines).

To get away from the freezing, we took an impromptu spring break trip to Tucson and visited Saguaro National Park. Ah, sunny southern Arizona. The perfect respite from the cold. Or not. It was in the 50s and windy the whole time. A saguaro leaned over and asked if it could borrow my coat, but I politely declined on the basis that I didn't have enough coats for all the cacti. The trip was actually really fun, the enjoyment of which was increased by the fact that we rented an economy-class car and they gave us an R/T Charger (bwahaha!). One of John's favorite movies, *The Wraith*, was filmed in the Tucson area, so we explored the filming locations and even found pieces of one of the cars destroyed in the film (35 years later!).

Sunshine and warmth did greet us when we visited Capitol Reef and Bryce Canyon National Parks over the summer. Bryce Canyon is one of the most beautiful places on Earth. Capitol Reef is underrated; it's got elements of the other major Utah parks but vastly fewer people. Make sure you try the fresh pies from the Gifford Homestead! Just don't feed any to the deer, who will walk right up to you.

We turned our house into Hotel de Cicero when Janice's ~~army~~ family piled into their Sprinter van and drove to Colorado from New York. The happy sounds of children's laughter filling the house from top to bottom was magical. On that same weekend, we "camped" at Jellystone Park with them, Steven's family, Jen's mom, and a thousand other people. Then we all headed over to the pool at Jen's mom's neighborhood because we apparently weren't tired of cold water. We cherish the time of having all the girls' cousins, aunts and uncles, and grandparents on that side being together simultaneously. It was a blast.

Speaking of blasts, Jen got to play the "1812 Overture" with the Woodland Park Wind Symphony for the 4th of July...accompanied by six Fort Carson cannons!

We got COVID for the second time. Thankfully, this time around, it wasn't quite as severe. It was interesting, though, that the relative effect on each family member was exactly the same as the first round.

After losing his job at the end of last year due to COVID lockdowns, John enjoyed some time off towards the beginning of the year, although if you were in Colorado, you likely remember the endless wave of snowfall in the spring (snow after Mother's Day...Heavens to Betsy), which inhibited his ability to knock out many honey-do items. He started a new job as a

Quality Engineer at Entegris and it is a great fit for him. Fast-paced, lots of data analysis, and the continual onslaught of manufacturing challenges.

After three years at Artemis Vision as an Engineering Technical Manager, Jen lost her job due to the vaccine mandate for federal contractors, despite working mostly from home and not being in contact with federal employees. How many more freedoms will get taken away before enough people are fed up? This change of situation has given her time to analyze COVID data and understand the real facts, adding to our concerns about censorship, slanted media, and the direction of our country.

The saddest part of the year was that John's dad passed away this summer after a painful fight with lung cancer. He was determined to keep living as normal as possible right up until the end, taking calls as a real estate broker, studying bowling technique, and playing board games, all the while never losing his sense of humor. During one doctor visit, he was asked, "Where is your cancer?" He replied, "Lung, spine, brain...other than that, nothing serious." The doctor said that John's dad had the best sense of humor he's ever seen in a cancer patient. We are SO grateful to have spent lots of time with him and John's mom. We could have spent these last two years holed up in fear of COVID, missing out on life in some misguided attempt to preserve it, and he would have passed all the same. But we visited them about a dozen times, cherishing the love and warmth of their smiles and creating everlasting memories, the things that we live for. The funeral was held in Denver and was also a happy-sad moment. We got to see many people we haven't seen in years and loved having Gina's family and John's mom stay at our house.

Since the passing of John's dad, his mom has taken on a new exotic hobby: scorpion hunting. The great news? She doesn't have to leave home to hunt them! The bad news? She doesn't have to leave home to hunt them. Her neighborhood has recently been infested, leading everyone to buy blacklight flashlights and search their yards at night (yes, scorpions glow in the dark; it's so cool!).

Some funny memories from 2021:

- "Can I have help biting down?" --Aubrey, eating a *very* stale ready-to-decorate Valentine cookie
- It turns out that if you are making biscuits, and you use 3 *cups* of sugar instead of 3 *teaspoons*, they don't raise nearly as well. On the plus side, we got to have sugar cookies as a side dish!

Please enjoy your holiday season. Live life. Know that even if times seem difficult now, it won't last forever, so get out there and let gratitude fill your heart. You are in ours and we're thinking of you. Let's all hope 2022 is great! Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

John, Jennifer, Kaitlyn, and Aubrey

"Give thanks in all circumstances" – 1 Thessalonians 5:18

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Merry Christmas

Love, The Cicero Family
John, Jennifer, Kaitlyn, and Aubrey