

2016 Christmas 'Howdy' from the Helgrens (www.helgren.com)

December 18, 2016

It never ceases to amaze me that after so many years on this earth, the “firsts” keep on coming. Evidence of a continually creating God that is taking us along for the ride.

First time in Los Cabos, Mexico. Deb and I spent 5 days mixing business with pleasure in January. Best part was ‘El Dia de Reyes’ (Epiphany). We enjoyed ‘Rosca de Reyes’ (kings cake) which has a tiny figurine of the baby Jesus hidden inside as a special gift for the lucky person who gets the piece with the figurine (not us...)

First book written (not yet published). A technical tome guaranteed to put anyone but a dedicated propeller-head to sleep. Just search on my name in Amazon.com and you’ll find it...

First time officiating at a wedding. The phrase “marrying my niece” may have a different connotation in Utah and Kentucky, but in my case I was honored to join Abbie (my niece) and Matt (her betrothed) in Holy Matrimony in Illinois in October.

We also experienced some endings: Jonas’ friend Jeb succumbed to brain cancer in February and my long time “Alaska home stay” friend, Bernita, also left this earthly life. So trips to Utah and Alaska brought some endings..

Jonas and Heather had a new arrival...no, not a baby (human) but a puppy, which is now a rather large animal if the rumors are true. Heather continues to advance her career at Cementation, Inc while Jonas juggles several hats at Red Touch Media. CTO of one subsidiary while IT director in general keeps him busy. A bit of overseas travel keeps it interesting. If that wasn’t enough for the two of them, the transformation of weedy wasteland of their landscaping into a lovely, terraced lawn with gardens is amazing. You can barely recognize the place!

Sam continues to push ahead with his career plans at England Logistics. He had a couple of promotions this year, the last being a national sales position for the company. We are excited for him, not only because he has worked hard and been rewarded, but also because of the “national” in his job title. We have hopes that he will visit the “nation of Texas” in his national travels. Sam also continues to distract me with pictures of his fishing exploits. A cutthroat trout here, another there. We need to get beyond the talking stage for a trip to Alaska....

In May, Deb and I spent a week in New Orleans at a conference and then I took her through Weeks Island, LA on our way home so she could see my original birthplace. The family gathered in Coronado, CA for the Thanksgiving holiday and we had a nearly perfect time together in the California sun. Even got in some fishing on my birthday! Very blessed to see the boys and Heather as often as we can.

We were in and out of Salt Lake a couple of times. A sad trip in February and then a “just passing through” trip when we went to Paddy Flat in Idaho for a weekend getaway. We really miss the west: Our family is there, our friends are there, cooler weather is there....

But we are also finding joy in Texas, despite the heat and humidity! Deb continues to volunteer as a BSF teaching leader for a day women’s class. She endured the stress of being displaced from her host church due to a fire this past summer and was blessed to find a new home for the class just a couple of weeks before it started in September.

We got a bit of relief from taking care of Deb’s mom when Deb’s sister Karen left teaching and is now providing full time care-giving to mom in Karen’s home while looking for a new chapter in her work life.

Me? I love my job and the folks I work with. Plenty of challenges. I still present at multiple technical conferences during the year. My 6 years on the board of directors of Common has ended. Still a long list of ideas and projects that I hope to chip away at over time. Maybe another book? Who knows? We are all on an amazing journey with Jesus.

I know the ‘Christmas letter’ is slowly fading into the sunset. As our original “social media” outlet, we have been producing these for almost all of the 35 years of our marriage. Just think of it as a slightly more personal way of letting you know that we love you and consider you family (some of you are!)

May Emmanuel, God with Us, bless you and your families this Christmas season!