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Adventure Is Out There



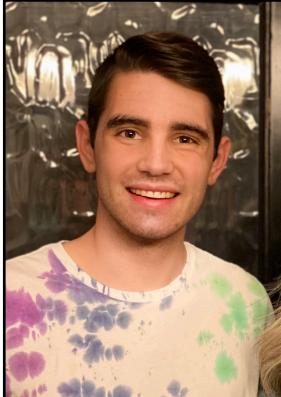
Once again, the pandemic put a damper on our hopes for grand adventure and exploration. We did, however, manage to escape the every day doldrums and chose some safe destinations. In April, we jetted off to Chicago and visited our favorite hot spots. We managed to score a fantastic brownstone in the heart of Wrigleyville and we spent the week at museums, zoos and even got to visit some old friends. It was the perfect little getaway and just enough to satisfy our wanderlust.

After our blissful beach experience last summer, we decided a repeat was in order. Once school was out, we headed to St. Augustine with friends for a relaxing week at the beach. One highlight was hiring an instructor to come give surfing lessons. While none of the kids are destined to become pro surfers, they had a great time learning to catch the waves. We also went kayaking in the intracoastal waters and saw loads of creatures including rose spoonbills, snowy egrets, an entire army of small crabs and even a baby armadillo.

Finally, in late June, we served for a week with Lighthouse Family Retreats. We headed to Panama City Beach and served an amazing family from Texas. We spent our days being the hands and feet of Christ as we played with their kids, cleaned their condo, ate together and built relationships. It was a truly remarkable week, and we look forward to repeating the experience next summer.

Adapting and Adulting

Pandemics are not good for huggers like Josh. As someone who derives life and energy from people, the loss of physical community has been challenging. Fortunately, he has his safe people and manages to find ways to connect. One of those ways was by moving out of his 2-person apartment and into a house with 8 friends. While the house is literally falling apart around them and should absolutely be condemned, at least they are in it together.



Over the summer, Josh took part in an internship with GT Research Institute. Quite honestly, I'm still a little unclear on what Josh actually did there. What I do know is that it involved math, computers, lasers and passing information securely. Josh loved it and by the end I'm confident he acquired the knowledge to either guard government secrets or hack a small country.

Josh's postponed plans to spend a semester abroad were also derailed...again. With borders closed and travel challenging, Josh was forced to remain stateside this fall. However, in desperate need of a break, he elected to only take 2 classes and keep a more relaxed pace for a bit. With his extra time, Josh increased his service with CCF, his favorite campus ministry, and poured into his community and friendships. He also took a day to be a guest speaker at my school for the 6th grade science class. Tackling the subject of a star's life cycle, he wowed the students with his expertise and facts about the solar system. The students were so enamored that one young man named his planet after Josh and another declared it was the only time he actually enjoyed science class. It's good to know that if space doesn't work out, Josh would kill it as a teacher.

Silver Linings

Nathan began 2021 living at home and taking classes at GSU, unclear about what was next for him. Ironically, the pandemic gave him time to reconsider and chart a new path. In February, Nathan was accepted to Samford University and shortly after, the school of music. Even before his acceptance, he was contacted by the head of the acapella choir and extended an invitation to audition. From there everything happened very quickly. God made it very clear that Samford was Nathan's next step and in August, we moved him into his dorm.

His fall semester started off with a bang with a full course load of 23 class hours. Sometimes left with little time to even eat, Nathan is in the deep end of music composition. Fortunately, there is still some time for fun, although even that often involves music. Frequently, once Nathan has completed all the have-tos, he sneaks into the university chapel to play the organ or grand piano. Given all the antics my college age son could engage in, learning the organ is about as tame as it gets. I'll take it.

Although we miss Nathan's laughter and music in the house, he has done a good job of staying present despite the distance. For

my birthday he made me a vinyl album of some of his compositions and titled it, "In Case You Miss Me." To say it made me teary is an understatement. He also frequently calls me just to chat or report in about his days. On one such occasion, I answered the phone to hear Nathan declare, "Well, I have good news and I have bad news. The good news is that there was an armadillo outside my dorm. The bad news is that I pet him and now I may have leprosy." Even from afar this kid is keeping my life interesting.



It Begins

Ellie began the 9th grade last fall and jumped into all things high school with both feet. After having a short reprieve from taxi driving with the boys, I am now shuttling Ellie around town to her various commitments and social engagements. She attended her first homecoming dance, but thankfully isn't too eager to date yet. Currently the only boys she thinks are worthy of her time and attention are her brothers.



Ellie continues to act and sing and last fall participated in a one act play at her school that went all the way to the state competition. Granted, she played a defeated and abandoned woman of Troy in an incredibly depressing story, but she was darn good at it. This spring she will take part in her first high school musical and is excited to enter the big leagues. She also still takes voice lessons and it's fun to hear her voice mature and improve. Although she doesn't like to sing in front of us, I sometimes stand outside her room with ear pressed to the door and I am blown away by what I hear. That girl definitely has some chops!

Ellie's new passion is aerial silks. She began taking lessons last February and took to it instantly. With absolutely no fear, she climbs 20 feet in the air, wraps herself in fabric and drops. It is both entrancing and terrifying to watch. The problem quickly became that 2 hours a week at the gym was not enough to satisfy her. That's when having Mark as a dad really paid off. A few weeks later, we had an in-ground trampoline, 30' of truss suspended 25' in the air and an elaborate (but highly safe) silks rig in the backyard. Like father like daughter, I suppose. Go big or go home.

Keep On Keeping On

2021 continued to present some challenges for Mark and me. The corporate event industry failed to rebound as we hoped and the year came and went without a single live event. Thankfully, a door opened into the world of virtual meetings and Mark walked confidently into new opportunities. The new platform proved so successful, that in October, Mark began a new company, Signature Productions Southeast and secured a property here in Roswell. The company will offer a full-service virtual meeting venue featuring innovative shoot spaces and advanced editing capability. Hoping to open in February, Mark spends his days managing the build out and receiving approximately 83 packages per day.

I am still teaching and enjoying the time with my students. The occasional virtual student keeps me on my toes and has taught me the value of adaptation and flexibility (not easy for a control freak!). With the slower pace the pandemic has forced, I've taken to bird watching. While I'm currently only an expert on the birds in my backyard, I have big aspirations for a retirement full of birding – which Mark has informed me I will be spending alone.



You Win Some, You Lose Some

The close of 2020 found us with 3 cats who were not peacefully coexisting. Pumpkin and Pixel had turned our home into a feline war zone. We tried medication, isolation and even rehoming Pumpkin to a nice elderly lady. Nothing worked. As a last-ditch effort, we asked Josh and his roommate, Jonathan, if they'd be willing to keep Pumpkin temporarily at their apartment. They agreed and we promptly enrolled Pumpkin at Georgia Tech. It turns out that Jonathan and Pumpkin are kindred spirits and in May, Jonathan requested permanent ownership of Pumpkin. We agreed and are thrilled to report that Pumpkin is happy and content and pursuing a degree in biomedical engineering.

The rest of the pets are mostly drama free. However, with Pumpkin gone, Pixel has found other ways to create chaos. Believing the garage holds untold treasure, she has taken to fervently pursuing her dream to live there. She regularly sits crying at the door and has even managed to get it open once or twice. I guess it's true what they say: you can take the cat out of the street, but you can't take the street out of the cat.

Beholding the Diamond

I once heard a pastor compare God and His word to a diamond, composed of various facets that all reflect a different truth or characteristic of our Father. For me, the facets are where it's at. I am an unapologetic Bible nerd and there are few things in life that fire me up like digging into the word of God. My phone has more Bible apps than social media and my bookshelf is full of commentaries, interlinear Bibles and concordances. I have been known to discover a "facet", fixate on it and then declare my revelations to everyone around me. The problem, however, is that sometimes I am so focused on the facet, that I miss the grandeur of the whole. In keeping with the diamond analogy, it is only when we behold all the facets together that we can truly appreciate the brilliance of the stone. The same is true of God. Sometimes, we need to step back and simply bask in the wonder of who He is. We need to soak up the marvelous mystery and swim in the depths of awe and majesty.

This year, amidst a sea of chaos, that is particularly important. It seems every day there is a new fact or opinion that begs for our attention. If we aren't careful, we can get stuck there. We can so easily immerse ourselves in the details, attempting to analyze, dissect and interpret that we lose site of the bigger plan God is working to accomplish. We take a single piece of information and desperately work to fit it into God's plan, discouraged because we just can't make sense of it. And often, we aren't meant to make sense of it. God's job is to orchestrate the journey. Our job is to be still and trust our Creator.

When details come at us fast and furious, it's hard to trust the story. Social media, the news, hallway conversations, all tempt us to fixate on one aspect or facet of the story. But God is not defined by a single truth or experience. God is fullness. God is completeness. God is the whole, perfect, magnificent diamond. This year, pause and consider. Step away from the mire of the details and allow yourself to be reminded, refreshed, and renewed by the undefinable, the unimaginable and the unexplainable nature of God.