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Making Up For Lost Time



After two years of limited travel, 2022 was the year to get out and explore. In April, Ellie and I jetted off to NYC and hit all the hotspots from the Statue of Liberty to Central Park. We saw Six and Music Man on Broadway and would've seen a dozen more shows if time and budget allowed.

In May, we headed to Hawaii and checked every box we could in 10 days. We visited Pearl Harbor, participated in a local luau and then headed to the Big Island, where the real fun began. We snorkeled at black sand beaches, dove coral reefs, hiked among waterfalls, and visited an octopus farm. The most memorable experiences, however, happened after dark. We witnessed the ongoing eruption of an active volcano at Volcano National Park and did some stargazing at Mauna Kea where we found ourselves lost and speechless among a sea of stars. We also took a plunge into the ocean at night and snorkeled with massive manta rays, watching the aquatic leviathans ascend from the depths and perform loops just inches from us. Overall, the trip was a thrilling escape that left us awe-struck at God's creation and humbled by just how small we are.

Following Hawaii, we stole away to Disney for a few days and oohed and ahed at all the magic it had to offer. Finally, we ended the year with a short 4 day cruise to Cozumel, Mexico and let the stress of the year melt away in the Caribbean sun.

The Final Flourish

Josh will graduate from Georgia Tech in May and it's a very odd feeling to realize that in a few short months, we will have an actual Mathematician and Astrophysicist in the house with the degree to prove it. Josh's childhood aspiration is right around the corner, and it is somewhat surreal, although thrilling at the same time. After graduating, Josh plans to take a year off from academia before eventually pursuing graduate school. While no solid plans have been made, he hopes to pursue some short term positions in his field of study and also spend some months doing global missions. After 18 years of school, I'd say he deserves a bit of a break.



In Josh's free time, he still volunteers with an organization in downtown Atlanta that serves the homeless and relishes the opportunity to love the marginalized with Christlike compassion and purpose. In the spring, he crowded into a van with friends and made the 20-hour drive to Juarez, Mexico to build homes and pour into the local community.

Lately, Josh has been spending his spare moments expanding his love and knowledge of stargazing. After receiving a telescope for his birthday, he has become extremely adept at locating all manner of heavenly bodies. Recently, he checked Neptune off the list and has now successfully located every planet in our solar system, which is seven more than I've been able to locate on my own. Watching Josh thrive in his area of giftedness is profoundly rewarding for us as parents. For years we watched him passionately grow his love for math and space and witnessing the first fruits of that pursuit is magnificent and humbling. While the next leg of the journey is still unfolding, whatever comes next, it is sure to be spectacular.

Making His Mark

Nathan finished his first year at Samford University with a bang. Having experienced success with his classes and the acapella choir, he joined the marching band this fall and also decided to try his hand at opera. He auditioned for The Magic Flute and earned the part of Sarastro. On the upside, he loved performing and amazed us with his powerful and deep bass voice. On the downside, his costume involved loads of gold glitter and even weeks after the performance, he was still discovering remnants of it in his hair, clothing, and dorm room.

Over the summer, Nathan worked at Signature Productions with Mark and quickly made himself indispensable as they worked to get the studio up and running. In his downtime, he regularly visited a local restaurant for all-you-can-eat wings, mastered the ukulele and proposed various baking challenges. One of our crowning achievements was successfully making the perfect croissant, which required the better part of 3 days. We decided 3 days for a single baked good is perhaps too much work.

Even with a full load of classes, Nathan still finds time for some antics. He frequently explores unknown places on campus and finds ways to leave his mark, from procuring and hiding dozens



of Samford rain ponchos to writing the musical "lick" on every whiteboard he finds. On one particular occasion, the university was holding a crawfish boil on the quad. Lamenting the unfortunate fate of the crawfish, Nathan and a friend boldly decided to rescue a few from the pots and release them in a nearby stream. Having no knowledge of the species or its natural habitat, it's entirely possible Nathan either just delayed their death or introduced an invasive species.

Moving Up

Now 16 years old, Ellie has successfully become the fifth and final Herring driver. With a very full and ever-expanding social calendar, it was about time. While Ellie doesn't love school, she has made the most of it and gotten involved in Student Council, National Honor Society and Art Club. Last fall she played a nun in the school musical and as always, loved being on stage.

Ellie has continued to practice aerial silks and just recently was asked to be part of the performance team at her gym. Given there aren't any games or competitions in silks, this will give her the perfect opportunity to showcase her skills. Watching Ellie gracefully climb, twirl and tumble on the silks is mesmerizing. She has never quite fit a traditional mold and we absolutely love that she has chosen such a unique interest. Furthermore, it's as impressive party trick whenever company is over.

While Ellie keeps herself busy with a variety of activities, it is her friends and family that drive her and inspire her. She is happiest when she is surrounded by the ones she loves and would spend every minute with friends if possible. Not only do they give her life and laughter, but she has a wonderful reputation of doing the same. She has a wicked sense of humor and delivers quips and one-liners with deadpan precision. But more importantly, she is uncharacteristically kind for a teenage girl. She loves her people so well and her friends are consistently drawn to her tender heart. And it is this compassion and gentleness that we are most proud of.



New Adventures

In March, Signature Production Group Southeast officially opened its doors for business. After months of procuring equipment and perfectly outfitting the space, Mark delivered a studio that is simply spectacular. From a variety of working sets and flawlessly configured control rooms to a full bar and secret speakeasy, every detail has been painstakingly created and executed. The work has been slower to come than we hoped, but 2023 looks hopeful and we are confident once word gets out, the line will be out the door. While I know the intended purpose is for the virtual meeting world, I am also convinced that in a pinch, the technology and equipment there could be used to coordinate a rocket launch.

Now in my 4th year of teaching, I decided to shake things up a bit and move to 10th grade British Literature. While I have loved the more complex material and deeper conversations, getting 15- and 16-year-olds excited about Beowulf and Canterbury Tales requires heroic effort and creativity. I must be doing something right since I recently received a thank you note from a student heralding my role as his favorite teacher, despite the fact that we read "garbage books."



That's Enough Pets! (said no Herring ever)

You would think 2 dogs and 2 cats would be enough. You'd think we'd call it quits and focus on keeping everyone alive and happy. Nope. Just about the time we had mastered managing all the feeding, walking, ball-throwing, and cat-wrangling, we decided to add saltwater fish. Mark jumped at the suggestion and several months later, we now have a 120-gallon aquarium, about a dozen resident fish, a handful of shrimps, and a brilliant array of corals. While one might think fish would be relatively drama free, nothing is further from the truth. In the last 6 months, we've had 2 fish make a break for it, one of which died a sad and lonely death on the hardwood floor, one fish relentlessly bully a smaller tankmate, and a clown fish get stuck in the overflow.

Despite the demands of our zoo, a house filled with all manner of life keeps us entertained and amused. Our fish all have names and personalities, the dogs offer continual comfort and companionship, and the cats tolerate us. I guess you can't ask for much more.

Eggs and Baskets

I have a bad habit of putting all my eggs in one basket. After spending two decades as a stay-at-home mom, generally that basket is time with my family. My primary love language is quality time and by extension, the moments with our five fill me and deliver life and purpose. The problem is that those "baskets" are becoming rarer as the kids get older and we are forced to hold trips and events loosely, not knowing who will be able to participate.

But there is an inherent problem with this. Because we live in a broken and fallen world, the baskets rarely deliver according to my expectations. Inevitably, things don't go as planned. Weather doesn't cooperate, accommodations aren't as anticipated, traffic creates delays. Sometimes it's just human brokenness that gets in the way, presenting in the form of relational discord or bad attitudes. Whatever it is, more often than not, I find myself holding a basket of cracked or rotten eggs, my hope and expectancy broken wide open on the realities of life.

For years, I've heard the quiet voice inside me reminding me not to put all my eggs in one basket and to hold my expectations loosely. But this year, I realized putting all my eggs in one basket isn't the problem. The problem is that I've been putting them in the wrong basket. I've been hanging my hopes on earthly happiness and contentment, which will always fall flat. Perfect fulfillment in this life is unattainable and the pursuit of it will always leave me wanting. However, when I put my hope in Christ, when I focus on the things that will never rot or break, my anticipation is not in vain. This coming year, I want to put all my eggs in the right basket. Jesus came bringing hope that life's circumstances cannot erode or spoil, hope that will always deliver what it promises and fulfill our deepest needs. As we navigate an earthly journey filled with struggle and disappointment, Jesus invites us to take all our hopes, and place them in the manger, the only basket that can faithfully and graciously meet all our expectations.