

JANICEKCHRISTMAS

December 2015



At the beach in Wisconsin - August 2015

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Ho Ho Howdy, y'all, and Merry Christmas! We hope this finds you warm, dry, happy and healthy. Another year has flown by and I hope you've been good because I have this gut feeling that Santa has a little something really special for you! Or, this gut feeling could just be indigestion. Or a fart brewing. Hell, I can't tell anymore. I'm turning 40 in a month and I think that's just kind of what happens in the ol' gastro-intestinal tract.

Speaking of plumbing, I was diagnosed with a kidney stone back in November. I was lying in bed one night, just reading, like I normally do, and a sharp pain hit me on the right side of my back, just below my rib cage. I'll spare you the details of my experience pacing around the house and writhing on the floor in the fetal position in the wee

hours of the morning until I finally woke Elise up and asked to take my temperature because I genuinely thought ISIS had strapped a pipe bomb to my appendix. A couple days later I found myself in an exam room where a physician's assistant and I had a very scientific conversation where she used very scientific terms like "flatulence," to which I answered, using very scientific statements like, "my farts are awesome, as usual. Here, pull my finger." And because of these scientific conversations, yours truly found himself, a day later, in one of those embarrassing surgical gowns having to urinate (scientific term) in various vessels, and subjected to a CT scan. And another day later, it was confirmed that I had a kidney stone. I was prescribed some narcotics (Latin term for "he who swalloweth will speak to the Unicorn") and a ureter dilator

(good name for a rock band), and was told that I will need to wait for it to pass (scientific term for "it's going to really hurt when you try to pee sometime between right now and the next seven days"). The good news is that I apparently passed the stone without even feeling it. I changed my diet, drank a lot of water, and every time I had to go to the restroom, I just hummed the Ureter Dilator's hit song, "Unicorn Flatulence" to distract myself, and things just sort of worked out for the best. So, for that, I'm thankful.

So now that I've got my little calcium oxalate crystal out of the way, let's move on to the next little thing. Mara started pre-school this year. She's a Faithful Fish at the Mornings with Jesus program at St. Paul's in south Austin. She's made a lot of new friends

and her teachers say she's doing great in school. She has class every Tuesday and Thursday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., and on the nights before class, she's always excited about the next school day as we're putting her to bed.

Mara's three-years-old now, which is a fun and unique age. For the most part, she speaks English. We can all carry a conversation with her, and almost rationalize with her. And by almost rationalize, I mean that she is always right. The entire family endeavored in a spirited game of Hungry Hungry Hippos recently where Mara yelled at us all because we weren't playing the game correctly. Our hippos were all too loud upon starting the game and trying to collect our respective marbles. According to Mara, the correct way for us to play was to all sit there while Mara used her hands to quietly scoop all of the marbles into the marble receptacle in her quadrant of the game board.

Mara's absolutely adorable. I've always thought she was a really cute child. I'd be the first to point out an ugly child of ours. We just haven't had one yet. She's really pretty, and reminds me a lot of Elise in not only her looks, but also in her personality and idiosyncrasies. She's so darn pretty, sweet, caring, selfless, funny and thoughtful, but man, sometimes it can take her FOREVER to do something. Like tell a story. About putting on her shoes. I kid you not, there was one time she was telling me all about getting her hair cut, and by the time she was done telling me the story, she needed another haircut.

Maly's nine-years-old now. She'll be 10 in April. Ten. I'm having a hard time wrapping my brain around that. Double-digits is kind of a big deal. She's now in the fourth grade and doing quite well. She's still pulling in mostly A's and the occasional B. She really lucked out this year and has Mrs. Tharp as her teacher again. Mrs. Tharp was also her Kindergarten teacher who moved up to teach the 4th grade a few years ago, so she's excited and happy about going to school every day. And the fourth grade comes with many more responsibilities. These responsibilities often leave Elise and me to quickly defer to the internet when often found in critical moments where it's required that we impart scholarly wisdom. Maly's now doing things in school like "long division" and "multiplying decimals" and "science fair projects." And gone are the days when we would just kind of do these things for her. Now we have to actually help in her educational journey and aligning ourselves with her teachers by encouraging her to think independently so Elise and I can duck into the other room and look up "long division" on the internet.

Maly has very much taken up a functional role in the household these days. She's an amazing and endearing older

sister to Mara. She owns the trash and recycling duties. She takes care of the animals. She mows the yard. It takes some nudging, but she cleans and tidies communal areas within the house. This year she has taken up baking. In fact, as I type this at the kitchen bar, she's baking Christmas sugar cookies. She also learned that Santa Claus isn't real. Looks like someone might be learning to bake sugar cookies over an open fire using a stocking full of coals.

I've been sitting here, trying to figure out how to sugarcoat it, but there really isn't a way. Elise turned 40 this year. We'd originally planned on doing something awesome for her birthday. Like scheduling a first colonoscopy or shopping for a reading glasses chain. We were actually to the point where we were going to throw a dart at a map and just hit the road and go on an exciting family vacation, but we ultimately decided to get new siding for the house instead. We know how to party.

Elise stays active keeping the girls out of protective custody and by feeding us all. She volunteers at the girls' schools and continues to be active at church. We both started the year off by running in Austin's 3M Half Marathon. It was the first half marathon for the both of us. Since then Elise has been going to five bootcamp classes a week. Yours truly continues to run a lot. I'm training for my first marathon in Houston in January.

The year also started with us adding a new member to the family. We adopted a cute little Australian cattle dog that we named Blue. We figured we were due for a dog, and wanted to teach the girls about the responsibility and companionship that comes with a dog. And she's been a great companion. She's a working dog and has a lot of energy, so she spends a lot of time in the house herding the cats. I'm sure the cats love their new friend.

This year brought us a loss, too. We lost a really good friend this year and it hit us pretty hard. It was a reminder to us that life is fleeting and to not pass up an opportunity to tell the ones that matter to us that we love them. We hope you do the same this time of year, and throughout your life.

We wish you love, laughter and happiness this Christmas and hope you're surrounded by those that you hold dearest. And don't forget to tell your people that you love them.

With our love,

Josh, Elise, Maly & Mara

