



Janicek Christmas 2017

MERRY CHRISTMAS AND HAPPY NEW YEAR

Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays, Good Tidings, Feliz Navidad and Dilly Dilly! I hope this newsletter finds you happy, healthy and full of holiday cheer. Usually authoring the annual Christmas newsletter finds me in shorts and flip flops, but I am writing this today while looking out the window and there is snow on the ground in Austin, TX! So much snow that Austin schools are closed today and there are overturned cars on the highways. But, it's Texas, and I'm sure tomorrow it'll be back to shorts, and mowing the lawn and whacking mosquitos with a baseball bat.

A lot has happened this year so sit back, top of your holiday mulled wine and indulge in stories of attempted parenting and middle-agedness. Elise and I are doing very well. We're both getting old. We're both ankle deep into our forties and our ankles hurt. Elise has persistent ankle and foot pains to the point where I think I'm just going to get her a cane for Christmas. I like to think she's being stubborn, but in all honesty, I think her hearing is shot, because she's old, and she just doesn't hear me when I tell her that she needs to schedule an appointment with a doctor.

Elise is staying busy between taking care of the girls, being Mara's Kindergarten homeroom mom, playing soccer, kickball and bootcamp classes. She has also been volunteering every couple weeks at the front desk at Kiker Elementary. And, of course, she's been doing a bunch of photography gigs on the side. We spent Elise's birthday at NXNW, which is a Pacific Northwest-inspired neighborhood restaurant where Elise enjoyed a flight of beer and gummed some fish soup.

You might remember from last year's newsletter that Elise was heavy in her training for the 3M Half Marathon. She stuck to her training plan and finished out the year strong by logging a lot of miles. We both toed the line at 3M and Elise trusted in her training, ran the entire 13.1 miles, coming in at 2:14 and beating her previous half marathon time by 43 minutes!

A month later we spent Elise's birthday at NXNW, which is a Pacific Northwest-inspired neighborhood restaurant where Elise enjoyed a flight of beer and gummed some fish soup.

Speaking of food, this year we finally decided to indulge and buy a Kamado Joe. It's one of those big, egg-shaped ceramic grills that retains its heat and will cook for hours and hours with minimal supervision or tinkering. We opted for the "Big Joe," which is the largest version in the line, and will allow me to slow smoke a whole cow, three turkeys, 39 racks of pork ribs, four boxes of Thin Mints and a partridge in a pear tree. The thing is so huge and heavy that it took four people to get it onto its final resting spot on the deck. I haven't told the girls yet, but part of the reason that I decided to bite the bullet and buy it was because if we endure any financial hardships or find ourselves facing the apocalypse, we can live in the thing.

Speaking of hardships, the oldest child turned 11-years-old this year and started middle school. When I was a kid, it was called junior high. Now they call it middle school. I think they call it that because when a child becomes eleven years of age, their brain is magically positioned somewhere in the middle of their

butt cheeks. Or maybe because the middle school child's parents' lives are placed somewhere in the middle of sanity and putting a fist full of valium in their pumpkin spiced lattes.

Since starting middle school, a lot of our conversations have been as such:

"Good morning, Sugar."

"Can I have a phone?!"

"How was school today, sweetie?"

"Can I have a phone?!"

"Did someone feed the dog?"

"Can I have a phone?!"

"Did you do your homework?"

"Can I have a phone?!"

"I read this awesome article about how birds fly in a 'V' formation because each bird catches the preceding bird's updraft. And then the birds alternate positions to maintain a sustainable flight formation. Speaking of, did anyone check on the smoked doves on the grill?"

"Can I have a phone?!"



Maly has been doing really well in school. She has maintained really good grades and chose theatre as her elective this year. She tried out for a technical role (costume design) in this year's play, and found out just this week that she got the part. She also emailed her counselor a couple weeks ago and was given permission to change from PE to dance in the second semester of school. Unfortunately sixth graders don't get to play sports, but next year she can sign up for things like volleyball, track, soccer, cross country and the like. I try to work "cross country" into our daily conversations, just to make sure that seed is planted. And then she asks for a phone.

Elise and I walk Maly to school every morning. Her school is a half mile from the house and up a 200-foot hill that gives us an opportunity to hang out with our first-born and get the blood flowing. Elise walks her up the hill on Tuesdays and Thursdays. I take her on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. On my walks with Maly, we'll talk about books, life, running, the weather, animals, boys, mascara, phones, food, fart jokes, or whatever bewilders us that morning. I know I speak for Elise, but whenever we're walking with our daughter, there are lots of parents in cars, rushing up that same hill to get their kids to school. We revel in those moments and walks, even if there's not much to talk about, because those moments are fleeting. I'm still baffled that she's eleven, in middle school, wants a phone and mascara, has an interest in boys, but I'm enamored that she's okay with walking with us, and that she talks to us. I always throw my arm around her at the top of the hill and give her a kiss on the cheek or on top of her head and I tell her that I love her. She says, "I love you, too." I wouldn't trade that for the world. She's a good kid. And we're learning that it's really, really hard to raise a good kid in this day and age.

Elise and I are having a hard time raising kids in this digital age. While I seem like I'm joking above, the oldest child does want a phone. She has an old iPhone that we let her play with, and text her friends with when she's home and connected to our home WiFi network. All of her peers have phones at school, and it's proving difficult to contend with those pressures. Elise and I holding strong because we keep abreast of studies of children who have access to smartphones, social media, the rise in teenage suicide rates, depression, and this concept of FOMO ("fear of missing out," or "fart on mom's ophthalmologist"). FOMO is kind of big thing in an adolescent's life. You and I experienced it. It was when you found out, after the fact, that you weren't invited to Bethany's birthday party. You were sad and felt dejected, and then you went into your room, ignored your parents, painted your fingernails black and listened to The Cure. Today all of that stuff happens in "real time" because it's on a phone on "social media." When we walk Maly up that hill, there are kids walking up that same hill, but they're all in some kind of homo antecessor posture with their heads buried in a phone, not looking up once. We want our children to experience the life and world around them - the seasons, the dogs, the other people, the spider web, the leaves, the sounds, the awkward boy conversations with dad. We'd want our children have their heads up and experience the world God gave them.

It's a struggle and Elise and I are trying to navigate it as best we can. And we're trying to be better at practicing what we preach. Elise and I are part of the last generation that grew up in a world without phones and the internet, and we're trying to raise the first generation that hasn't known a life without phones and the internet. We'll figure it out somehow. I'm sure there's an article about it on the internet.

Mara turned five this year and she started Kindergarten. Having two kids in two different schools has made for some chaotic and fast-paced mornings. We're constantly having to remind Mara to stay on task, which usually entails her getting dressed, brushing her hair and teeth, going to the bathroom and getting her shoes on. Speaking of shoes, one of Mara's milestones this year was learning how to tie her own shoes. Having experienced these milestones already with Maly, it's important that Elise and I slow down, experience and praise Mara's firsts.

She's doing really well at school and making lots of friends. She uses words like "runded," "eated," and we understand her, and are hesitant to correct her because her vernacular is almost as cute as her person, and we're clinging on to that childhood innocence and carelessness because we know, before too long, she's going to be asking for a phone, and she's going to have views and opinions.

A second child is hard. Especially when she reaches those milestones that include reasoning and thoughtful inquisition. Elise and I have made up all the answers to the hard questions for over a decade already. We're tired. But we have to remember that there's a fresh & impressionable human we're still responsible for and obligated to keep out of juvie.

Me, you ask? I'm alright. I've been exchanging some time for some money to keep the roof up and the food warm. I'm coming up on my fourth year at Under Armour, and they've been nice enough to put me on some pretty cool projects. I've been doing some running. The beginning of the year brought about winning my age division in the Austin Distance Challenge. That came with some injuries and a performance in the Austin Marathon that seriously made me consider giving up on running all together. I took some time to physically and emotionally recover for a bit, while maintaining my running base and weekly mileage, and then Elise and I took a trip to Seattle. I'd never been to the Pacific Northwest, and I totally loved it. We went in June, when the weather was agreeable and we had an amazing time sans kids. I signed up for the Light at the End of the Tunnel Marathon in Snoqualmie Pass, a beautiful race in the Cascade Mountains on the John Wayne Pioneer Trail in an effort to qualify for the Boston Marathon. My goal was to run the race in three hours and ten minutes. I wound up crossing the finish line at 03:05:42 and will be toeing the line of the 2018 Boston Marathon on Patriot's Day. In October 11 of us competed in the 223-mile Capital to Coast Relay from Austin to Corpus Christi where we crossed the finish line in 29 hours and 53 minutes, finished 4th in our division, and only had to take one runner to the hospital. Presently I'm in the throes of running long distances in my training for the Bandera Endurance Race 50k that I'll be competing in on January 6th. You know when a race's tagline is "Where everything bites, cuts or stings" it's going to be a hoot. After Bandera I'll go right

back into marathon training in preparation for Boston. In October I became a certified Road Runners Club of American running coach, and just a couple weeks ago I was approached by the president of the Austin Runner's Club with a request to join their Board of Directors.

We'll be spending Christmas in Des Moines with Elise's family this year. We hope you get lots of time to spend with those that you love for the holidays and all of the other days too. Here's to a happy, healthy, hilarious and heartfelt holiday season.

With our love,

Josh, Elise, Maly & MQTQ

