
JANICEK CHRISTMAS



We wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Man. Christmas really snuck up on me this year. This is the least prepared I've been in writing this newsletter. It's usually on the Friday after Thanksgiving that I hold my feet to the proverbial fire and start upon my existential introspection and recounting of the past year for fodder for this letter. And then invariably I'll get distracted by things like bills, the future, and wondering what the scientific name is for eye boogers. So here it is on Christmas Eve and I find myself scrambling to recount the year. It's hard to recount the year for myself, let alone the three other people that live in this house. Right now I'm trying to remember if I even ate breakfast, and the names of the three other people that live in this house.

I won't lie. I seriously considered not writing the newsletter this year. But then I go back and look at the archives and I've written this newsletter for 20 years now. It looks like the only year I didn't write one was in 2020, and we all know what happened that year. That's right, a lot happened in 2020. Notably, I was struck with selective amnesia and forgot how to type after learning of the death of Eddie Van Halen.

This time last year I was in the throes of a series of races called the Austin Distance Challenge. My goal was to win the series outright with the two remaining races that were coming up in January and February. I did wind up winning that series, and after all the pomp and celebration from all the months of preparation and

hundreds of miles training, I brought home my winning pint glass, put it on the work bench in the garage where it is now filled with rocks that Mara and I will one day put into the rock polisher.

February greeted us with another crazy ice storm here in Central Texas. Cities shut down as rain and ice accumulated and the temperatures plummeted.

Countless trees were destroyed from limbs breaking and the days seemed to drag on as we all holed up in side and contemplated things like global warming and the scientific name for eye boogers.

It was during the Christmas break last year, while we were in far northern frozen plains Des Moines that I found myself again in that mode of existential introspection. After the holidays I passively searched for a new job to no avail. In February I had an honest conversation with my boss and asked him if he'd "fire" me so I could at least claim unemployment compensation while I looked for a more fulfilling livelihood.



And four months later I found myself working for the local nonprofit run club. Working for a nonprofit means nonprofit pay. Which means Elise and I had many conversations before I took the new job and she decided that she would go back to working full time. We just wouldn't be able to make ends meet on my salary alone.

For me, finding a job is a production. It requires research, networking, updating my resume, reassessing my skills, experiences, and interests, more networking, eye boogers, and sending out countless unanswered resumes. For Elise, finding her first full-time job in 17 years was an exercise in rolling over in bed one morning, opening her email, and calling an old friend who'd placed a job ad. And then she had a job the following week. So now Elise is working on the administrative team at Wilson Roofing, which is one of Austin's oldest roofing companies.

Elise is very excited about her new job. She's ambitious and has all kinds of news about the goings on at the office every day. In fact, she came home just the other day and excitedly told me all about the first official meeting that she was invited to attend. It was like witnessing a child experiencing a Jolly Rancher for the first time in its life. And I was quietly reminded of one of my favorite Dave Barry quotes: "If you had to identify, in one word, the reason why the human race has not achieved, and never will achieve, its full potential, that word would be 'meetings.'"

So now we're one of those couples that are referred to as DINKs: Dual income, nagging kids. I'm joshin'. The kids aren't nags.

Mara is now 11 years-old and in the 6th grade. Sixth grade is kind of a big deal because it means a new school. She's now a middle schooler. When I was growing up it was called junior high, but now we call it middle school. She's adapting well to the new landscape. Middle school is always different as the children become much more



independent. Instead of having one teacher for all subjects, they have a teacher for each subject. And they have to change classrooms for each period. Middle school is also when social bonds are tested and broken and new links are forged.

She's doing well on all fronts. Elise and I enjoy watching her grow into her own. It's a little sad to watch her grow up because she's our baby. She's at that age where she's not as much into toys and playing. She's more into YouTube shorts and fancy fingernails these days. But she's still our little love bug. There's a part of me that's scared that she's going to outgrow her parents, but so far there's been no indication of that and we're hanging on to all the hugs she'll give us.



Maly is now 17 years-old and a senior in high school. Her life has been a bit of a whirlwind this year. Back in July she received an email from the head lacrosse coach at the University of Charleston West Virginia, expressing interest in recruiting her to play Division II lacrosse. After some email exchanges and phone calls, Elise and Maly made a trip out to the campus in October for a recruiting camp. The city, campus, coach, university president, lacrosse program, team, and nursing program checked all of the boxes, so on November 8th, she committed to attending UCWV next Fall.

As I type this, on Christmas Eve, she's started to have second thoughts about hauling off 1,200 miles away. To the point of tears. I think it might have something to do with it being Christmastime and realizing that time is fleeting and big changes are just over the horizon.

It has been difficult for us to come to terms with the fact that our first born will be leaving the nest, but we know that this is all part of the circle of life. She's growing up and her time is drawing near to have her own adventures in life independently. And today we reminded her that life is just that: an adventure. She has a fantastic opportunity in front of her, and she'll *always* have this nest to come home to.

Lacrosse took us a couple adventures later in the year. This summer we road tripped it up to Indiana for a club lacrosse tournament. We stopped in Little Rock and Memphis on the way up, and some countless and uneventful miles in Missouri and Illinois as we made our way to Des Moines for a week-long visit with Steve and Joanne. Our trip home took us by way of western Missouri and into Arkansas again, and then back into Texas to drop Maly off at summer camp.

The Thanksgiving break found us in central Florida for another club lacrosse tournament, and we decided to make a week of it and spend a day at Universal Studios where we indulged in a lot of Hogwarts, Hogsmeade, and butter beer. And we spent a day bumming around at Cocoa Beach before flying back to Texas on the day before Thanksgiving. That was a hoot and a story in and of itself. I will tell you



that seeing the faces of 15,000 weary and impatient travelers as the three of us follow Elise while she cuts in front of them in the TSA line at 5 a.m. is a sight to behold.

With the business and goings on of the day, it has drawn near my bedtime. That's my fault for having waited until Christmas Eve to write the annual newsletter. As I type this, I tell myself I'll do better next year. But I'll bet I forget. Actually, I won't forget. I'll start thinking about it around Thanksgiving again. And I'll contemplate not writing it again because the thought of recounting the year gets more and more difficult as each year passes. I'll probably still write it. I've a year to think about it.

I'm not a religious person. I was born into a Catholic family and I married into a Catholic family. Every year I attend Christmas Eve mass with my family. I'll attend mass every once in a while throughout the year too. Seems I have an inclination to do that more so these days. Perhaps my subconscious is telling me to make right with God as maybe I have less years before me than I do behind. Perhaps it's because I've become wiser in my years and I've learned to appreciate listening and learning, especially if the lesson is of the moral variety. During tonight's mass I found myself remembering a gift that was given to me 12 years ago. The gift was a book from a friend from that time in my life. We were work friends and we've both since moved on and our paths haven't crossed since. But for some reason I remembered that book tonight and how thoughtful it was for him to give it to me. He remembered a conversation that we'd had and he knew that I had an interest in a topic for which this book was based. He thought of me and he took the time to procure this book because he knew that I would enjoy it. And I very much did enjoy it, and I guess it made a lasting impression on me, otherwise I wouldn't have recounted that experience this Christmas Eve. The book was a small gesture, but knowing that he thought about me and cared made the gift extra special.



I think it's important to think of those gifts we've been given, and the people who have given them to us. Sometimes we feel very alone or insignificant, but we're not. Maybe we're lucky and have an endless roster of those who care for and love us. Maybe we can count those people on one hand. But always remember that someone loves you very, very much, and you've made an enormous impact in their life. We all have the opportunity to give our gift. It doesn't have to be of the tangible variety. A smile or a gesture. Your time is a thoughtful way to express that you care. We each have a finite amount of our time to give and to share it with others is the most precious gift of all.

We wish you all a very merry Christmas and hope you get to spend it with the ones you love.

We love you!

Jack, Elise, Maly & Mara