

Oh my gosh, it's already Christmas Eve and we're on final for a concert in under 4 hours for Christmas Eve Mass at St. Johns featuring the Corelli Christmas Concerto (Pastorale from No. 8 in G), Pachelbel's Canon in D, the Mozart Ave Verum Corpus, and a whole lot of Christmas Carols. Isabella and I are playing with the Choir and doing some string interludes for the 4PM Mass.

Unfortunately, we had a little snafu regarding the North Pole and Santa's Elves that caused a bit of a stir on the 23rd... Seems that one of the major delivery services that the Elves sub-contract out to texted me with an emergency note that a somewhat critical package that was to have been delivered on Christmas Eve was now somewhere in "Michigan" (probably a code name for one of Santa's secret factories) and would be delivered not via the usual Christmas Eve sleigh, but rather via some sort of Ox Cart on or about December 27th, and was this OK with me? (It said "Please reply STOP! if this was not OK")... so I duly replied STOP! Since this was definitely not OK, and then began working frantically on Plan B - contact Santa via the shortwave radio and then attempt delivery by boat to our house since the overland routes appeared to be iced in with a new weather pattern strangely called "Global Warming"... This latter plan appears to have been successful and I expect a small row-boat to appear shortly with the desired presents – the elves sub-contractor (who shall remain nameless, but often goes by a 3-letter name starting with U) has promised that their duly apologetic representative will be here between 1130 and 330 today – so all is in order on that front once more and we can now get back to enjoying a wonderful Christmas ☺

At the same time as all the aforementioned excitement regarding the Elves, Mom decided that she was going to catch whatever version of the Plague was currently going around Lily's school. Lily was, of course, immune to the Plague due to her strong genes and past exposure, but she decided to take a day off school "just for fun" since everyone else at school was already sick and she saw a great opportunity to enjoy free TV and avoid the dreaded Phonics which is apparently WORSE than the Plague – if she is to be believed. So we called up Dr. Seuss and ordered some Zizzrmaxx or something that sounds a bit like that and Mom spent the whole day visiting various Doctors who confirmed that yes-indeed the Plague was going around and it would last about 1-2 weeks. Perhaps if early-Europeans had such predictive powers we might have avoided several unfortunate chapters in History – I guess they also would have needed Dr. Seuss as well... so Mom's on tea and toast and the big-Z for the duration and we are all set for a nice cozy Christmas Eve and Christmas Morning with some sniffles and lots of laughter and joy.

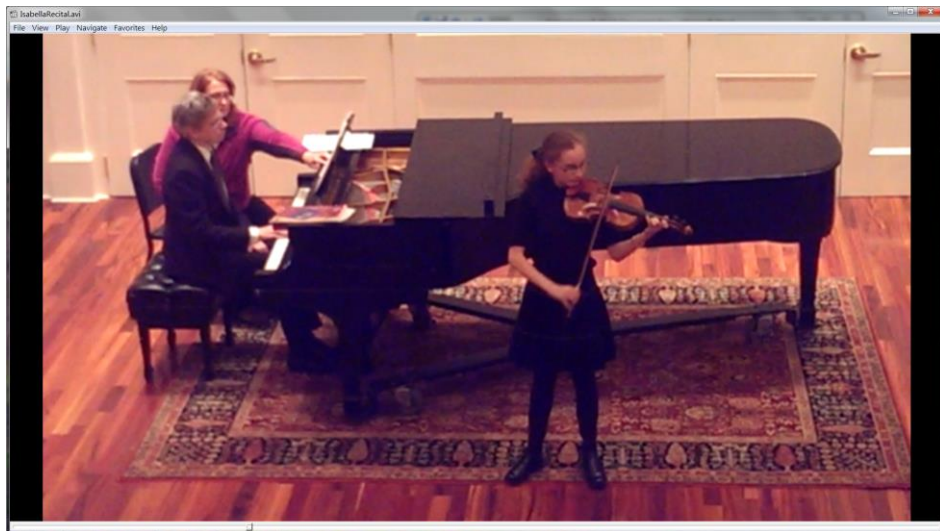
Christopher had asked for notes on 2013, which is why I have put pen to paper today (go with me on that – it's a beautiful metaphor – I imagine a quill pen, gold parchment, and ink flowing onto the page...). We have many reasons to be joyful this Holiday Season – so many joys that it's hard to make lists and assign priorities – so I'll just hit on some highlights.

Our year was mostly about our family and we really made a lot of progress with Lily, had great fun home schooling Isabella, as well as a memorable drive across the country visiting the National Parks and getting to Oregon for Elizabeth and John's wedding – so much to fill pages of memoirs – or as the biblical poet once said "My Cup Runneth Over"...

Lily is now in the second grade, and is doing fine – perhaps most importantly, she had eye surgery in October to correct Strabismus, or alignment of her eyes, in October/2013 – the results are extraordinary and her vision is slightly improved because she no longer tilts her head to force her eyes to align – her absolute vision is unchanged in either eye – but the visual fields are now better aligned and her good eye can function better – I attach two post-op pictures:



Isabella's schedule for music and dance made the weeks fly by with few breaks – we spend 5 days a week with the Boston Ballet, including Saturdays; and every Friday, Mom, Lily, and Isabella depart at 2PM to take a 40 mile journey to the Rivers Conservatory for Violin Lessons and Orchestra returning in the evening. Isabella played Sarabande (Bohm) in recital, while Lily is working on her bow hold:



Our trip across the country was another highlight of 2013 - we spent three weeks travelling about 4500 miles and visited Niagara Falls, Yellowstone, the Grand Tetons, and US Glacier National Park before arriving in Oregon for Elizabeth and John's wedding. On the way we visited the Dinosaur Museum in Thermopolis and rafted the Wind River across the remote Indian Reservation of the same name. Here's Isabella working to dig up Dinosaur bones, and then clean them:



And here's Dad and Isabella rafting the Wind River (Isabella in front, Dad in white helmet):



A few days later we scouted the rapids on the Yellowstone River:



But we decided not to raft that river after we found the two big waterfalls downstream – upper and lower Yellowstone Falls ☺



Jackson, Cody, Thermopolis, even Gillette Wyoming (bet you were not expecting that) are now places that hold amazing memories that will forever unite and revitalize us. We saw Old Faithful, Mammoth Hot Springs, The Grand Teton, and many extraordinary sights as we travelled and shared a wonderful trip together.



Glacier National Park was our next stop – truly a step back in time to see the “tree lodge” and the Amtrak Station as well as drive the Road To The Sun and stay in historic Whitefish, Montana – definitely a great place to vacation.



And we even found time to practice some music along the way, and yes, before you ask, I did wear my hat the entire trip... The western shop in Cody Wyoming said it “had memories” and was definitely the height of fashion for the region☺



We then spent a wonderful two weeks in Oregon, and I think everyone else has the pictures, so I'll hold off on those - and then we raced back to Boston so I could go back to work at the Salt Mines here. Fortunately, we also took a couple of weeks before Labor Day to travel by boat to Vineyard and Haven and Nantucket for some relaxing time together (that's the boat in the background with Lily wading off the beach):



So with that I'll wrap up this narrative, and due to the late hour I'll just put it on the email to everyone so that Christopher does not have to summarize, and can stick with whatever he invented about us since I was remiss in not sending anything earlier.

From Boston, on Christmas Eve, 2013: "Merry Christmas to all, and to all a Good Night!"

p.s. See you Jan 3 (we get into PDX 11:55PM Jan 2)!

Love,

Patrick, Tracy, Isabella, and Lily