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THE WITTE TIMES



THE BIRD, THE BIRD, THE BIRD IS THE WORD

VOLUME 14, DECEMBER 2011

SULTRY AND EXOTIC LANSING, MICHIGAN



bad. Maybe they aren't that exceptional and I am just too trapped in my little view of reality to realize it, but "tumultuous" seems to be a pretty good descriptor for both the world we live in today and life in general, at least from where I sit and type Christmas newsletters.

Through all the excitement, though, some things never change, and one of those would be this exercise in verbosity I have come to call "The Witte Times." It's Sunday, December 4 at 5:48 a.m. and I need to get pecking.

AN IMAGINATIVE INTRO TITLE GOES HERE

2011: it's the future already. I can't believe how quickly it got here. Ok, some of the predictions were a bit off: no black alien obelisks on the moon, no bases on the moon, no runaway moon thrown out of orbit by a nuclear waste explosion, but still, we're living in amazing times. I find them both amazingly good and amazingly



WELCOME, GUAN NAN, TO YOUR BIZARRE NEW AMERICAN FAMILY

When we told Jake's friend, Jakob Reed, we were going to have a Chinese exchange student staying with us for the next year, Jakob just shook his head in pity. (Jakob thinks our family should have its own sitcom.) The consensus was that the Wittes put the voltage in "culture shock." ZAP! That's gonna leave a mark.

Nonetheless, in September, just before school started, Guan nan Chen (or Jack, as he also likes to be called) came to live with our family. For the first couple of days, he looked pretty shell-shocked. This wasn't surprising, as the first thing we did once he got here was to throw him in the Suburban with the rest of the inmates and drag him off to Wisconsin (more on that later).

Since then, Guan nan has adapted pretty well. Guan nan comes from Shenzhen, which is next door to Hong Kong. Latitude-wise, Shenzhen is just slightly north of Honolulu, so not only does Guan nan

have to acclimate to a new culture, but also a new climate.

The first week he was here, we took him to the figure-8 bus races.



Guan nan's a very studious, conscientious boy and is mostly doing very well as a sophomore at LCS. I think he's enjoying his stay with our family. He has an off-beat sense of humor, and his uniqueness has been assimilated into our particular Borg collective.¹

Guan nan joined the Robotics team and is varsity bowling for Lansing Christian. (In order to be on the varsity bowling team at LCS, one must have the physical strength to lift the ball, and Guan nan therefore qualifies.)

I like to make up nonsense phrases, use Google Translate to convert them to Chinese hieroglyphics, and paste them on his Facebook page. We're doing our best to convince Guan nan that when he goes

¹ This is a *Star Trek: The Next Generation* reference, for all you non-dork readers. That's four sci-fi references, for anyone who is counting.

home, he should forgive the American debt. We're patriots, after all.



We've been very busy teaching him card games. His English is improving and he is slowly learning to talk smack.

Anyway, he's been a great addition to the family, and we have really enjoyed our new Chinese son.

CAITLIN: THE GINGER WITH SOUL

Ah, Caitlin. I'm pretty sure that headline gets me in deep trouble, but my beautiful, passionate, artistic, petite redhead has soul aplenty.

Caty continues to make

the piano do things I can only dream of. I don't think she entirely understands that if I could have only one thing in life that I don't have now, it would be her talent with the piano. As it is, I am just in wonder that I get to have that talent in my home. She's now working on



singing with the piano and writing her own lyrics. She has also played at several events over the year.

She loves to get involved in extracurricular activities. Last January she was diving for LCS and is planning on diving again. This summer she went to soccer and tennis camps. This fall she played volleyball and is currently on the eighth grade cheerleading team. In the spring she ran track and did hurdles. Yikes!

I have always thought that the junior high years are the toughest for kids, as they start having to take more responsibility just when they are starting to develop stronger skills at shirking it. As Caty finishes off junior high, it's nice to see that she's emerging strong. This last year has been one of great growth for her and it has been wonderful to watch.

She wants a rubber band and a paper clip for Christmas. (At least, that's what her Dad keeps saying.) Actually, I think she wants recording equipment to continue making music recordings. The only problem with that is that would be a gift for us more than her. Maybe Santa will decide that that is no problem at all.

JAKE: THE MAN, THE MYTH

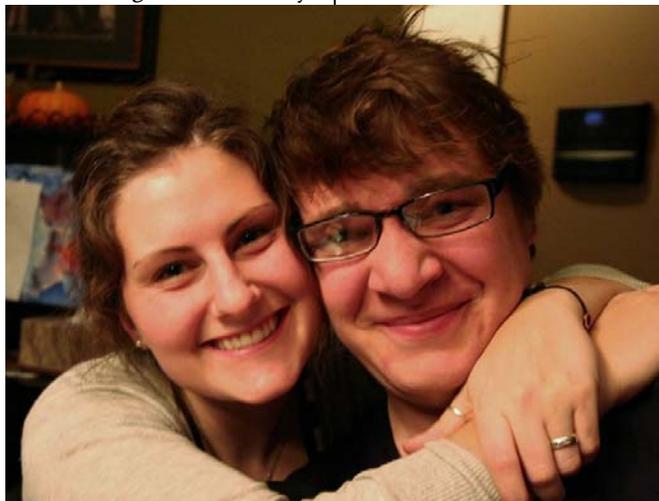
The older of our two juniors, Jake is having a solid fall semester at Calvin College. I think he had a bit of a sophomore slump last year, but he seems to be coming back strong this year.

Jake started off thinking about a major in English or psychology and flirted with social work and education for about a week each, but he seems settled on communications, and is enjoying the courses so far.

He finished dorm life last spring and this year is staying with my sister-in-law Lanae and her husband, John. It's a long bus ride to Calvin from their house, with a transfer in between. Commuting has made for some really long days for Jake but he's been a real trooper about it.

He worked at Calvin's cafeteria last year and this fall he began working evenings at Great Lakes Scrip Center where Lanae is employed.

Last summer Jake had a job working with an inventory company. He worked all hours, counting everything you can imagine, from candies to clothing. Over school breaks he's working at PacSun, a clothing



store in the mall. His first day of work started at midnight on Black Friday. Nothing like a baptism of fire....

Jake continues to date Lindsey Marshall, who is

studying nursing at Jackson Community College. I'm impressed that they have been able to keep their relationship working despite the distance between Grand Rapids and Jackson. We really like Linds and enjoy her a ton when she visits.

Jake is a senior moderator on a website that is centered on making images of guns using a limited set of graphics tools. His creations are incredibly detailed. It's fascinating to watch him working on his guns; the attention to detail is outstanding. I think his steady nature helps to keep the discussion on the site interesting and even-tempered.

One of the things I love about Jake is his playful, gentle and understanding spir-

it. I think he sees other people very clearly, and that helps him see himself the same way.

ALLISON, ADVENTURER OF THE NORTH

2011 was a watershed year for Allie. She graduated from LCS *magna cum laude* and headed off for college at the University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point, far off in the hinterlands of Cheeseheadland.

One milestone of particular significance to Allie was completing her second year in the SET program at Haslett High School. She thoroughly enjoyed the class and is now using what she learned in her job working on the events staff at the UWSP Dreyfus University Center.

At graduation she was recognized for being one of two top students at LCS in both English and Art.

This spring Allie entered the MSUFUCU art contest and won the second place juried award for a piece she created by cutting paper and creating images from the negative space. She also served as stage manager for the high school production of *Joseph's Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat*.



Over the summer she and I built a loft for her dorm room. It's pretty elaborate, with provision for electrical equipment, shelving for books, built-in mirrors, and so on.

This fall we took Allie to Stevens Point so that she could become a Pointer. We took a trailer with us to haul the loft and the rest of her stuff. All seven of us piled



into the Suburban for the ten-hour trip to Wisconsin. It was hard to leave her.

She has been enjoying her freshman year immensely. She is taking two art classes and an intro to ROTC, not because she plans on joining the ROTC program but because it takes care of her "wellness" requirement. She also took up Belgarth Medieval Combat, "a fun, safe, and inexpensive sport" involving beating one another senseless with foam-covered swords. So far, only one injury.

It sounds like Allison will be taking an on-line course for "Winterim" and will be home for an extra four weeks following Christmas break. It will be like old times around here.

Somewhere in the middle of there, she got her driver's license. She doesn't get a car at school, either.

THE MANY SIDES OF SETH

There's nothing interesting about Seth. I know this, because he just said so.

Wrong again, bucko.

Seth has developed a fascination with Google SketchUp. SketchUp is a 3D

drawing program that is free to download, and is popular in architecture, animation, and a wide variety of other fields. His skillset is rapidly expanding and his subject choices are fascinating. He loves cars from the '30's, '40's and '50's and makes vehicles of his own design.

He continues to participate in the First Robotics program (Team 1504: The Desperate Penguins) working in the animation group. We had our first competition last winter and are gearing up for the 2012 competition. I am a mentor on the team and we have had lots of fun with it.

We spent a lot of time together this year tearing apart notebook computers and repairing them, successfully for the most part.

Seth has shown other signs of growing up. He now has his learner's permit, a girlfriend (Carli Galey, also a junior at Lansing Christian), and some stubble. Seth, Carli and Seth's friend Ben Von Ilten went to the LCS Retro Prom this year and Seth won first place for his retro-garb, mostly pulled out of my closet. He did have the vintage dork look and wore it well. Way to go, my son.

Along with Guan nan, Seth, Carli and



Ben are also on the LCS bowling team. They have their first meet this week. I hope they each get a strike for me.

HAPPINESS AND JOY

Confirming my status as the luckiest man on the planet, Joy continues to be a wonderful wife, mother, lawyer and my best friend.

Joy's days remain busy. She continues to be our firm's lead landlord/tenant



counsel, celebrated 25 years of practice as of this May, and appears in courts throughout mid-Michigan several days a week. She does this while still handling most of the kid-chauffeuring duties. Many of her days are spent behind the wheel, between court and school events.

She is still happily babysitting occasionally for Jonah & Elijah, the four-year old and 18-month old boys across the street.

She has also started volunteering at Riverview Church because, you know, she wouldn't want to get bored.

Earlier this year she spent a weekend in Chicago with her friend Natalie Wilmarth at the Wilmarth's apartment in a downtown Chicago highrise. They had a wonderful weekend; I am still hearing about what a nice time she had.

Joy is getting more familiar with Chicago, or at least driving through it on her way to Stevens Point. She has handled the lions' share of trips to visit Allie. She will shortly be embarking on her fifth trip when she goes to bring Allie and her roommate, Jen Smith, home for Christmas break.



This year marked our 22nd year of marriage. A day doesn't go by when I am not

thankful for having this wonderful woman in my life. To think that I have had the good fortune to be married to her more than two decades is simply a wonderment to me.

ME, MYSELF AND I

Probably the most significant thing that happened for me this year is that I got my first letter published in *Car and Driver* magazine. Unsurprisingly, it was a silly wordplay joke that made the editorial cut, not some pithy observation on the state of the automotive art.

Things remain fine in my little corner of the legal world. This is my second year of being the chair of the Western District Federal Bar Association Bankruptcy Section, which means I get a lot of undeserved respect and deference. The power is slowly going to my head.

Machines have been making me crazy this year. I have had nothing but difficulties with the various machines, hobby and otherwise, in my life. It's teaching me the valuable lesson that while hobbies are fun, the most important things in life don't rely upon internal combustion. That's right: I am talking about money.

I started messing around with some High Dynamic Range (HDR) photography software this year, which explains some of the funkier images in this year's newsletter. Gotta love the digital age.

I wish I could say there was something really cool and momentous that I did, but I have been living a pretty tame life. Meow.

FAMILY OUTINGS, ETC.

We really haven't done too much this year in the way of major trips. Probably the most significant was our third venture to Topsail Island for spring break. Unfortunately, Jake's schedule didn't permit him to come along, so this was the first spring break without him.

This year we brought along Caty's friend Austin Barcy, and Seth and Allie

brought Ben and Hannah Von Ilten. We also brought along my mom and Joy's sister Gay Ellen. We rented a big house on the beach and met Rich, Sharon, Bailey, Charlie, and Rich and Sharon's niece, Paige, so we had a huge group. What a pleasant time! I wanna go back.

At the end of July, five of us enjoyed a Bankruptcy Seminar weekend at Boyne Mountain and Joy and the kids spent a ton of time at the hotel's indoor waterpark.

This summer the Ostrandersons came up to mom's house on Lily Lake, as they usually do, and my sister Cate, Dennis and Liam were also there. We took a trip out to the Leelanau Peninsula and did some river tubing on the Muskegon River.



In other family news, Joy's brother Keith and his wife Kristy had their second child, Melanie Arianne. It's wonderful that Grayson now has a little sister, and we are very happy for them.

So there you have it. 2011, summarized and photographed, is about to stop being the future and move into the past. I hope that your 2011 was wonderful, and that your 2012 will be even better. In the meantime, Merry Christmas to you and yours.

—THE WITTES

Please keep in touch:

Norman and Joy Witte
10711 W. Jolly Road
Lansing, Michigan 48911
(517) 913-5111

ncwritte@wittelaw.com

jlwritte@wittelaw.com

www.wittelaw.com/personal

Past issues:

www.wittelaw.com/personal/times