



*What's red and white and red and white and red and white?
Me, rolling down a hill!! Ho Ho Ho!!!*

The Witte Times



Let the Good Times Roll

Volume 18, December 2015

Lansing, Michigan, the Epicenter of the Universe



That's Ben Von Ilten lurking in the background, as he often does in our pictures.

everything done at work, shopping for new health insurance for the family, starting Christmas shopping (haven't yet) and, oh, by the way, writing this newsletter...which has proven to be unusually difficult with a constantly-crashing computer.

There's no time for anything and my stress level is over 9,000.

So, to help dial things back a bit, ease the strain and get in the holiday spirit, let's make one more list: Things for Which I'm Thankful. Here comes the first bullet point...

Lists

I need to make more lists.

I need to make a list of the lists I need to make.

This year started really slow but things have sped up incredibly in the last quarter, like Santa rolling downhill. I'm skidding into December on two wheels, trying to get

Jake and Pursuit of the Juris Doctor

There's this thing in law school called a "book award." It's given to the student in each class who gets the highest score for the semester. Earlier this year Jake was expressing his disappointment that he only got one book award his second semester of law school. That was his fourth. I somewhat peevishly pointed out that this



was four more than his mother and I earned in our combined law school careers.

This was a pleasantly surprising turn of events. None of us, least of all Jake, expected him to do as well as he has in law school. After three semesters, he has booked six classes and is the only student in his class with a 4.0 GPA. He did an externship for a circuit judge during his first year, is doing another externship for a criminal defense attorney, is working as a teaching assistant for a criminal law class, and just learned that he is going to be the articles editor for the law review.

Wow.

Needless to say, Jake's working very hard in law school. He's usually out the door before 7:00 a.m. and has developed an exhaustive system for outlining classes and preparing for exams. I talked to him regarding all the hard work and he said, "I'm eating my vegetables so that I can have fun later."

That's a great strategy. Right now law school enrollment is down because, well, there are probably too many lawyers. That means that jobs are harder to come by. However, there are always jobs for outstanding students, and Jake knows this.





Our son is reaching the stage of life where he and his peers are finishing degrees, working through graduate school, marrying and starting careers. Jake was the best man at the wedding of Matt and Samantha Lureau this summer. He spends as much time as he can with his girlfriend, Lindsey Marshall, who is finishing nursing school this year at Grand Valley and it sounds like they'd like to settle down in Grand Rapids after Jake finishes law school. We certainly hope that he doesn't move too far away, and GR is not a long drive from here.

If he continues as he has been, he should be able to find work wherever he wants.

Allison's Victory Lap

Allison is finishing up her fifth year at University of Wisconsin Stevens Point, what



we've been referring to as her "Victory Lap." She decided to stay an extra year so that she could complete a dual major in 2D design and graphic design.

Last spring Joy and I drove to Stevens Point to see the spring senior show. Allison's presentation consisted of a number of art books she made and they are really something to experience. These aren't books like ones you might pull off the shelf in a book store.

These are made from a variety of media, and have very unusual forms. The art compliments the text, combining to really give the words life. Allison has always been a fantastic writer and poet and her books are intricately-crafted, eloquent epiphanies.

Allie spent the summer in Stevens Point working on a visitors' guide for the local

visitors' bureau. She enjoyed experiencing Wisconsin at a time when it isn't frozen, though she did make a number of trips home, several of which were associated with being maid of honor in Jennifer Smith (now Spreng)'s happy wedding.

This fall has been a busy one for Allison, with the annual ramp up associated with Daisho-Con. As in past years, she was responsible for producing a 114-page program guide and all associated graphic design materials for this live event and for running all the lighting and sound tech for this three-day non-stop event. This year over 5,000 geeks, nerds and fanatics attended and despite some drama, and adversity, the event and her part in it were successes.



We're amazed at the competency Allie brings to these jobs; Joy and three of our kids were able to attend to be amazed in person.

Next year Allison plans to attend law school. She hasn't yet decided where to go, though I think she plans on returning to Michigan. We're thrilled to have her coming back home, or at least a lot closer to home. It's possible that she might attend Wayne State, where Joy and I graduated. That would really be something!

Seth by Design

Seth's last year has been a busy one at the College for Creative Studies in Detroit. At the end of his sophomore year last spring, he had his review. All of the sophomores in Transportation Design go through the review process and are told whether they are allowed to stay in the program, and which of the three areas of study in the major they will be allowed to pursue. Seth's review went very well and he was told he was permitted to pick the major of his choice.

Over the summer he took classes at Grand Valley to experience what a "normal" college was like and to get some of his prerequisites out of the way at a less expensive school. He enjoyed the summer there and found it to be pretty easy after the rigors of CCS.

This fall he's been participating in a studio sponsored by GM to design a 2020 Corvette. Right now they are in the process of making 1/5th scale clay models of their designs. He has been working literally around the clock on it and it's been a real blast to watch his progress.

The program is very intense, but that of course means that he is learning a lot very quickly, and we can see massive improvement in his skills.

Despite the demanding work load, he's loving it and has really thrived at CCS. I have to admit to more than a little jealousy since I never had homework anywhere near as cool as what he is doing.

Caitlin in College

Caitlin is in her second year in The Early College program at Lansing Community College and has plans to graduate from Williamston High School.



The way The Early College program works, students don't attend their high school but only have classes on LCC's campus. However, you have to enroll through a public school program because The Early College is sponsored and funded through the public intermediate school district. Caty attended all but her last

marking period prior to The Early College at Lansing Christian, so she enrolled at Williamston through the schools of choice program in order to attend The Early College. All of this is a long way of saying that she'll walk to get her diploma next spring at a school she never actually attended.

Funny how that works.

While she is working on her

high school diploma, she is also taking college courses, so she's in a very challenging program, with a lot of responsibility.

Caty continues to compose on the piano and there is nothing better than walking in the house after work when she is playing. It's one of the best parts of my day. I love her music and am amazed by her talent. I made some recordings of her playing earlier this fall. You can listen to one here:

<http://tinyurl.com/ov62dm3>

It is a wonder to me how naturally this beauty flows out of her. I treasure these days because I know the time will come when she moves away, and live performances will be much more rare experiences for me. In the meantime, I can only use words to describe how precious this young lady is to me.



My Friend Glenn

Jinyoung Ha, known as Glenn on these shores, is back with us for his sophomore year at Lansing Christian.

Glenn is a quiet fellow, but when he speaks his rich baritone voice is a bit of a surprise. He sang in choir last year and is in the chorale at school this year. I think he should be in a barbershop quartet with that voice. At the Christmas choir concert both last year and this year, he accompanied the choir on piano, and plays quite well, though not often enough for my tastes (hint, hint).



Glenn is doing very well in school this year and is imperturbably good-natured. This despite my tendency to yell his name at the top of my lungs whenever I see him, or tackle him just because, well, because.

Yes, and he still came back. Resilient kid, huh?

Carl's Triumphant Return

Our frequent readers will recall that Carl Wang, or Jianqiao Wang, as he's known on the other side of the planet, came to live with us last year to attend Lansing Christian as a junior.

Well, he finished that junior thing. Some highlights from his first school year in the states include going on the junior trip to Gettysburg, attending a Pistons game wherein the Cavaliers predictably demol-

ished the hometown heroes, and going on a family trip to Topsail Island over the Christmas break. He also entered a juried art contest with a drawing that garnered enough attention that a patron bought it.

After spending his summer at

English and he's speaking much better. He's now working on getting a great grade on the TOEFL exam, required for foreign students for whom English is a second language to attend college in the US. He hopes to go to MSU. I say, **GO GREEN!**

The Dynamic Duo

Midway through the year, Seth's friends Marsheid and Marsellus Beelen moved in with us. They're staying with us for awhile, working while they save up money to get back into college. They seem to tolerate me



home in China he returned to us for his senior year. This year he is playing basketball at Lansing Christian and seems to be enjoying it. Over the summer Carl took tutoring in

mixing up their names passingly well (they are identical twins).

We're enjoying having them here. They're cheerful young men and happy to help out around the house.





They are aiming to have a place on their own at the beginning of March, and we're glad that we were able to host them for a time.

The Whirlwind Wife

Joy remains incredibly busy. With a houseful of five young people who often need rides various places, I am thinking that when all the kids are gone she will have enough experience to substantially

enhance the family coffers working for Uber.

In the last couple of years Joy has been doing a lot of running and swimming, often with our neighbor Erin House. Joy ran in a 5K sponsored by Lansing Christian this fall and was the fastest in her division. My theory is that she is too busy to waste time being slow.

She continues to do the vast majority of our landlord/tenant hearings and IMHO does a great job with the clients and tenants. She enjoys the clients and appearing in the same courts so that she knows the staff and the regular L/T attorneys around this part of the state. This month she cele-

brated 30 years since graduation.

Joy and I had a wonderful romantic getaway for an extended weekend in Bloomington, Indiana. On the way down we stopped at the Grissom Air Reserve Base Museum in Peru, Indiana and got to take pictures of our car posing with airplanes. We loved Bloomington and also visited nearby Nashville, Indiana, which touts itself as an "Historic Hoosier Artists Colony." Here's a little video I made of cruising around Brown County on our trip.

<http://tinyurl.com/ocqybxgn>

While there we ordered six handmade new chairs for the dining room and some sofa and end tables for the living room.

When she's not doing all of those things, she continues to serve as the president of the Hidden Treasures Thrift Store board, and as a very active volunteer there.

Oh, and cooking. She does a lot of cooking.

At least she's not bored...

Cars and Barns

It's been an exciting year for me as work started on building a second pole barn (now mostly complete) and on finishing our existing pole barn, so that I will have a warm place to work on cars in the winter. I also got a two-post vehicle lift, which was a life-long dream for me.





We added two cars to the fleet and lost one. The first addition was a 1990 Cadillac Fleetwood, which the kids agree is a grandpa car. I disagree, because I'm not a grandpa, but it was too good a deal to pass up and I love the car.

The subtraction was our 2008 Aura,

Parting Shots

So, I've written a few Christmas letters and read a few more. I can't help but ask

I don't think so.

It's human nature to put the best spin on things, but that's nothing new to anyone. I love hearing good news from my friends and I love sharing mine. When we share our good news, we encourage each other. I know things aren't perfect here or at your house either. But in this joyous season, it is right to count our blessings and to celebrate those around us.

So thank you for sharing the celebration with us this year. I hope your 2015 was great, and that your 2016 is even better.

Oh, and Merry Christmas!

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which an offspring that shall remain nameless (Allie) fender-bendered into that great insurance salvage-title graveyard in the sky (or maybe central Wisconsin).

This led to the second vehicular acquisition, a 2008 Cadillac STS Platinum Edition that is just a killer ride. It has every option you could think of and some you couldn't.

We went to a lot of car shows. Also, I lost 75 pounds this year.

So just, to recap:

- Barns +1
- Cadillacs +2
- Saturns -1
- Pounds -75

That works out to ~73 for the year.

myself whether there's a bit of false advertising going on, as these letters always seem to paint everyone in such a glowing light, conveniently omitting news that might not be so great.

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