

Happy New Year!



December 2016 was a busy month for me, so my annual Christmas letter had to turn into a New Year letter. Let's get right into it, shall we?

I decided to treat myself in January for my 46th birthday. Just down the road from me is the lovely town of Astoria, Oregon, at the mouth of the Columbia River as it empties into the Pacific Ocean. I splurged on a luxurious room right on the water, and had a chauffeured ride in a restored 1958 Chevrolet out to dinner that night. Later in the month Tara and I made a quick trip to Moyie Springs and visited Jim in the snow.

In February we lost Aunt Sue and gathered in Lebanon, Oregon to remember her life. I am grateful that my move here ten years ago brought me closer to my Haley family. The end of February I saw the best concert of the year, the group Black Violin, in which two classically trained violinists blend their traditional skills with modern hip hop.

My longtime friend Vladimir came to Portland house-hunting in March, and we joined my realtor friend Stacey for a cool, rainy day looking at potential places to live. Soon Vlad found a home and moved to Portland! After 16 years of long-distance friendship, we are now co-located. Also in March, Jess came to stay for a few days. This year marks 30 years we have known each other. I was introduced to the wildness of Portland Timbers soccer fans, and during the spring attended a few home games. If you've ever heard of the Timbers Army, you can know that the stories are not exaggerated.

In April the ground dried out enough for me to begin the mowing season. I learned minor riding lawnmower repair skills, and also learned that for major repairs, when the tractor repair shop says your mower will be ready in a week to 10 days, it takes a month. One of the most stressful parts of my entire summer was keeping up with mowing 4 acres of grass while using a lemon of a mower. Luckily Tara helped. I made my first of two trips over to Idaho to help my Pa pack up the big house on the river.

Tara and I went camping as usual for Mother's Day in May. We camped somewhat close to Tara's OSU campus, to save on travel time. This tradition has become important to both of us. Encouraged by Tara's infatuation with Broadway and all things of the stage, I've been trying to purchase a few tickets a year to some kind of show. We saw our first opera, Showboat, last year, and this year I went to see Mozart's opera Magic Flute, which was a curious and memorable production. I joined cycling friends for their weekend tradition at the coast. I drove in with gear and supplies, while the cyclists all rode their bikes 100 miles from town. We played in the rain on the beach, and I learned to play bananagrams with the crazy bike people. I hired a local man to build me a decent chicken pen, and by the end of the month it was complete. Sadly, by that time one of my hens had wandered into the road and was hit by a car. I purchased two pullets to bring my hens back up to five.

Pa sold his house and was finally ready to make his big move to Romania, but had too many cats. So I headed over in May to help him run a few errands and bring a couple cats home. Thomas and Yeowler (I re-named him Chaplin) settled in for summer at my place out here in the country. My neighbor and longtime friend begged me for the cats when I told him I was inheriting them, but I turned him down. From May through August, the boys and Racecar developed a worsening relationship. Cat fights woke me nearly every night. The cats were injuring each other and I had to keep them separated. I fed the boys outside on the deck, which attracted raccoons. Racecar took to hiding underneath the couch all day long in her own home. In September I called up my neighbor. He still wanted the cats for his farmhouse on 80 acres, and is hoping for a little rodent control. So Thomas and Chaplin moved again, but this time they have no other cats to share the space with – just cows, horses, goats, pigs, and chickens.

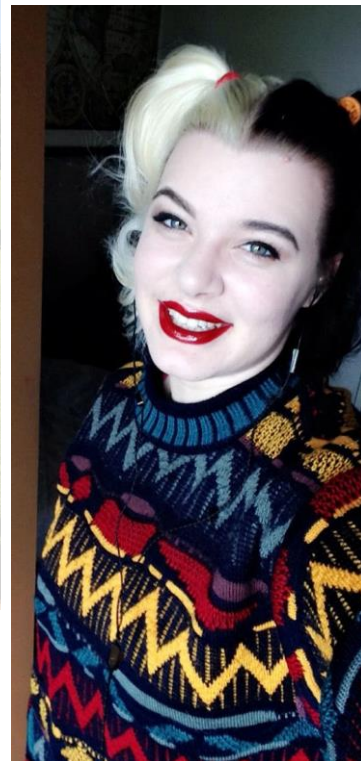
Mads flew out from Boston in June to attend a conference in Portland, so I had the chance to see one of my favourite friends in the whole world. Tara and I met Mads and another conference attendee and toured the International Rose Test Garden and the Oregon Holocaust Memorial. I introduced Mads to my fave steak restaurant, where you can choose your meat based on the animal's breed, diet, and the location of its farm (just like in Portlandia!). Tara is now old enough to vote, and not only voted in November, but also in the Presidential primaries. Tara volunteered to help register other college students to vote in a program with the simple, non-partisan goal of getting young people to vote and to research their votes. I love that my kid takes voting so seriously.

Tara turned 19 in July and we visited the Enchanted Forest in Salem, which has become another family tradition – more convenient and more unique than our favourite Disneyland theme park. I found a federal employee retirement counselor and began planning for my retirement in ten years. It looks like I'll be able to stop working for Uncle Sam at age 57 and I am very excited about that idea! The diligence and frustration of being a public servant are going to finally pay off.

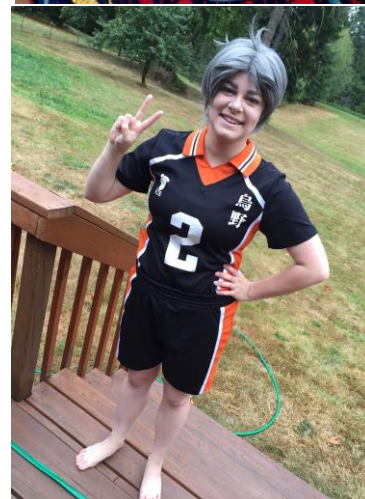
In June I met with the Board of Veterans Affairs for a hearing regarding my own VA claim for service connection of my posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Any reminder of my military trauma is hard to process, and by the end of July I was struggling. I took three weeks off work to get my head together and begin therapy again. By the middle of August I was calmer, and stronger, and ready to go back to work. If VA grants my claim I will have all medical appointments and prescriptions related to my service-connected health issues paid for by VA. I also hiked into the Goat Rocks Wilderness with my friend Douglas, reasoning that since I'm Crystal, the best medicine is to get my feet onto a trail. It rained during the entire trip, but the views were spectacular, the food was fabulous, and nothing beats being in the mountains.

In March I began a series of appointments with a dental surgeon. No one likes dental work, but Tara and I had tons this year, and we are both SO GLAD about it. By August I had a new tooth placed. After 4 years without a molar, I can finally chew on the right side of my mouth again. Yay! Tara had a terrible oral infection during Spring term and a clinician suggested it was related to their wisdom teeth. The same oral surgeon that placed my implant assured Tara that all four wisdom teeth needed to come out immediately. I have some pretty funny stories to tell about a massively drugged out Tara trying to eat a smoothie after that August surgery.

Over the summer a coyote killed one of my new pullets, and the other one turned rogue, so I got to butcher my first chicken. With the help of YouTube videos it was easier than I expected, and I was very proud to be able to remove her innards without a hitch. She was leaner and tougher than store bought chickens, but I have to assume she was a



healthier meal. I'm back to just three hens. Later in the month we headed up to Idaho to visit Jim again. We met his friend Jane and the four of us had a beautiful hike up Clifty Mountain for some unparalleled views of that gorgeous valley all the way up to Canada.



Tara started Sophomore year at Oregon State University under better circumstances than last year. Freshman year was filled with questions and stress, but this year has been a million times better. Tara's self-assurance finally has a chance to shine through, and the routine of registering for classes is known territory. One of the best changes is that Tara lives in a house in town now, with roommates, and no longer has to deal with the cramped space and the drama of a dormitory. The roommates get along great and T takes turns cooking healthy fresh meals with one of them, while the non-cooking housemates contribute most of the food. It's a good bargain, and Tara is feeling healthier in body as well as spirit.

As you know, I have been active with the local Mt. Hood Cherokee group, and I continue my volunteer work to publish their quarterly newsletter. One of the Cherokees I've had a chance to get to know is a Vietnam veteran, a photographer, and most importantly a beautiful person. I got to see his astonishing work with macro photography of sliced rock at a local gem & mineral show in October. 2016 put him in the path of much magic and discovery related to his work, and as his friend I benefitted by hearing about his residency at the Crow's Shadow Institute and his very exciting project at the famous She Who Watches pictograph site. Joe never stops reminding me that we are all one – the people, the rocks, the plants, the animals – and it's a lesson I am glad to keep learning.

Tara attended Kumoricon Lite in August, for those people who just couldn't stand the wait for the real anime convention. Halloween weekend was Kumoricon, Tara's number one event of the year. They came home from college and abandoned Mom to stay in Portland closer to the action. The three-day convention is so huge that this year it had to be moved from our beloved Vancouver site to the Oregon Convention Center.

In November I was stunned to see the country elect for President one of the most despicable people I could imagine. I'm not talking politics, I'm talking misogyny, racism, elitism, tax evasion, employer fraud, xenophobia, ridiculing those with

disability, climate change denial, transphobia, dishonesty, insecurity, and bullying to name just a few of the qualities our new President is proud to display. I know Americans voted this way hoping for change in our political system. Well, hopefully it will shake up politics and turn out for the better in the end. And hopefully his election doesn't bolster the confidence of a whole new generation of jerks in America. Please people, just love each other. Please.

I went on a wine-tasting tour in November with some co-workers. Oregon has an exploding wine industry, exceeded only by its craft beer industry, and it was high time I checked out the scene. We also took a tour of a sake brewery – one of only six in the U.S. In early November I received a phone call from my longtime friend Margaret. “Meet me in Santiago!” she said. It was time for an adventure! I made some phone calls and a few weeks later found myself in South America.

November 29th I left for an 11-day vacation in Chile. Read my blog for stories and photos.

<https://crystaltrulove.wordpress.com/> We began in the capital, Santiago. We explored markets and museums, a university campus, parks, streets filled with vendors, and even a beautiful post office building built in 1908 and still used as a post office. There are huge outdoor markets in Santiago, bursting with late Spring vegetables and freshly caught fish. We tried the Chilean king crab in season, and loved the local alcoholic drink, Pisco Sour. We visited a book sale and I bought a Chilean graphic novel for Tara and had the author sign it. From there we spent a day in Vina del Mar, a city on the ocean. We then took an overnight sleeper bus 400 miles south to Temuco. In Santiago, the weather was in the 80s and I had to buy some emergency flip-flops from a vendor to deal with the heat. But as we traveled south over the next week, it got cooler, and we saw more rainy days as we explored the countryside during Spring time in Chile.

We stayed a couple nights in a luxury hotel on lake Villarica near the Villarica Volcano. The flight to Chile was expensive, but once we arrived, costs were very low and lodging was affordable. We rented a car and drove up the foothills of the volcano, then hiked to some nearby mountain lakes. Margaret avoided stepping on a 4-inch wide tarantula on the trail. We drove south to Puerto Varas and more volcanoes and lakes! In Ensenada we went on my very first river rafting trip ever. It was terrifying at first, and then it was a blast. Chile's long eastern border is formed by the Andes mountains, so everywhere we went were lakes and rivers and lush green mountains. It reminded me often of the lush green mountains and rivers of Japan.

We hiked past waterfalls, around Lago Todos los Santos, the “most beautiful lake in Chile,” and drove through an area settled by German immigrants on the shores of Lake Llanquihue. I discovered that stray dogs in Chile absolutely love me, and that the indigenous Mapuche people still fight for their lands. On our last morning together I kissed my friend goodbye at the bus station as she moved on to the next stage of her South America adventure, and I spent the day exploring Puerto Montt and Santiago again, before I flew home to a snowy December.

I remember how I fell in love with Turkey, but my love for a foreign country was not matched again until this one. What Chile and Turkey have in common is warm, friendly, generous people. I guess for me, it's the people that make a place. That, and volcanoes!

Tara came home from college with a newly-declared major of Geology, a new advisor, and a new outlook on the future. It's gratifying to see my Tara happy and self-assured as an adult. We went out Christmas tree hunting with a USFS tag into a National Forest and came upon two young guys who had spent the night in their little car on a remote forest road, trapped on the ice and high-centered on a snow berm. We towed them to a place where they could turn around before heading off to get our tree. That evening, returning in a snowstorm, we were almost the only vehicle moving up the steep slopes to get to our home in Rainier, while many other cars were stuck on the ice. I am grateful once more for my steadfast Jeep, that has come through for me multiple times this year.

On New Year's Eve I rang in the first minutes of 2017 with a group of friends and surrounded by much laughter and love. Couldn't ask for more.