

It's Christmas time again

At the beginning of 2022, Pedro and I took a long weekend in Boston for my birthday to go see friends. Despite snow and temperatures in the single digits, we explored a lot of the city in a couple days. We went skiing at Mt. Wachusett with Mads, Udi, and Kai, and Romain met us for dinner. We got a personal tour of the MIT and Harvard campuses by Romain, and thus Pedro finally got to visit universities he had dreamed of visiting. He was fascinated with MIT.nano, a facility dedicated to studying things as small as individual atoms. I began taking Spanish classes at Lower Columbia Community College in Longview, which is 20 minutes away. All year we dealt with my "arts problem," in that I cannot resist spontaneously purchasing tickets to shows. In 2022, we saw the Portland Symphony Orchestra, live comedy, Black Violin, and lots of plays at The Armory.



Pedro and I try to walk and hike whenever possible, and I constantly use my AllTrails app to find new trails wherever we are. In February we hiked the Gnat Creek Trail, somewhat near my home. For Pedro's birthday he requested a yurt on the coast, and dune buggies. The yurt was outstanding and the buggy less so. Our day on the sand was raining and freezing cold and the rental people gave us many instructions about off limits areas and safety warnings and we were scared to death to go over any hills or between any trees, or venture too far from the parking lot because apparently people commonly wreck their quads and have to pay for them. We enjoyed the rest of our coastal road trip, getting out multiple times to hike the trails on the seashore, and to spot lighthouses. We also visited Shore Acres SP and visited fellow Cherokees Brian and Melissa, who live in the area. We were lucky to host Ian & Karen for two visits to my house.

I was fixin' to buy all new jeans again for the third time in three years because I couldn't squish my body into the ones I had anymore. I decided I couldn't afford to keep gaining weight. I detest diets and continued to eat whatever and whenever I wanted...but beginning in February I ensured that I had less calories coming in than going out. By September I had lost thirty pounds and did not have to buy new clothes again. High five!

Travis and family were unable to travel due to Covid, so Tanner's family decided we should have a sibling family reunion in Arizona in March. I made a solo road trip, staying the first night with my brother Eli, his wife Addie, and their boys Parker and Paxton in Boise. On my way south I drove through Oregon, Idaho, Utah, and finally Arizona, and explored Moab, Edge of the Cedars SP where I got to go inside an actual Kiva, in an ancestral Puebloan community in Utah. I saw the Sand Island Petroglyphs and Petroglyphs in Holbrook and the Petrified Forest NP in AZ before I stopped in to visit my longtime friend, Marlene, who recently moved there from Oregon. The main event was the first time Tanner, Travis, and I have ever been together, and the first time I had seen Travis in person since Mom died in 2011. Travis, his wife Bree, and their son Lex hosted the rest of us at their house for dinner and the best after-dinner game of cards I've ever played. The visit included a true blast from the past when we were able to visit Miki and Bill Grady, my supervisor when we worked at the National Weather Service in Burlington, Vermont. Then Haley cousins David Vincent and Keith Paschal and his wife Brenda drove to our Airbnb and shared dinner with us one night. Tanner's family and I went on a couple of desert hikes. On the way home I drove north through California all the way to Oregon, and I hiked to Millard Falls outside of Los Angeles.

In March I donated blood with no problems, but in April they wanted me to use their Red Cross app. The app asked me to identify as male or female. Any time I am asked this question and there is no



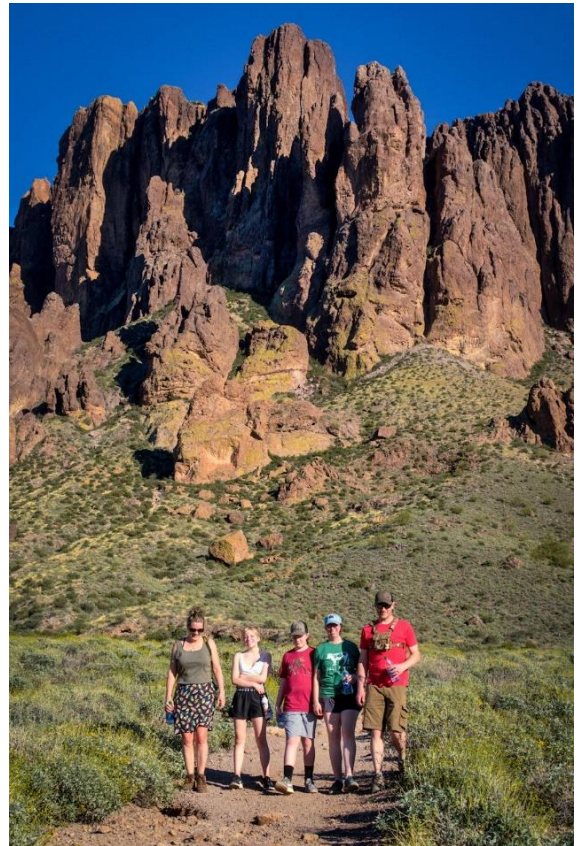
third option, I always answer male, to passively-aggressively mess with their system which does not welcome someone like my own child who is neither male nor female. Well, Red Cross cannot abide and now I'm not allowed to donate blood unless I either tell them I'm female, or stop having sex. I won't do either. Did you realize FDA still thinks gay male blood is a threat to society? I speed-walked in the Hunger Run in St. Helens for the third time and Pedro ran in the Shamrock Run in Portland for the second time. I raised four new chickens to replace ones that had died from attacks by raccoons, coyotes, and my neighbor's dogs. A hawk got one of those, and I ended the year with six hens total.

I agreed to become a Spanish tutor at LCC. Not that I can speak Spanish – not even close, but they didn't have any Spanish tutors and said they needed me. After training, I began the job at the end of March. I worked until Fall and in all that time, I only had ONE student come and ask for Spanish help. Despite the massive bi-weekly paychecks of \$167, I decided to give up the gig. I have not, however, given up the gig of Cherokee newsletter Editor, which I have been doing for 8 years now. I'm still the editor of the Great Spirit Church newsletter after 3 years. With that volunteer work, and my blog (15 years!) I nourish my love of writing and research. After having visited the MIT campus, Pedro was motivated to get his company's support to take an online MIT course this year, with certification open to students around the world. The April-August course was an Applied Data Science Program. Pedro finished with 100% and was third in his class. Of about 120 students, 1/3 of them dropped out due to the challenging material. Now we can say Pedro is an MIT student! He continues to be highly valued as a Data Scientist, and the senior member of the research team at OCHIN, a Portland-based company that stores and manages medical data for hospitals and clinics across the country.

We lost Great Aunt Esther Elizabeth in April, and I traveled to the funeral with Great Uncles Dwight and Darrell, the surviving siblings of the Haley clan, and with Aunt Joyce. The funeral and the gathering afterward provided a sad but needed opportunity to be with family (especially my favourite cousin Debbie!), and a chance to remember Liz's vivacious spirit. In April, my cat Racecar got the diagnosis of kidney disease. There's nothing to do for that but try to keep her comfortable until she dies. She also went deaf this spring. She's 16 years old now and growing cantankerous. The good news is, as of the end of the year she is still having more good days than bad. I attended two arts events in Portland in April, celebrating local Native American artists, including Martha, one of the Yurok fishermen I started working with back in 2020. My friend Vladimir finally got to meet Pedro in April and again in May.

I was in the Hippie Chick race again, and the next morning was Mother's Day. I drove down to Albany to ride the carousel and then meet with my kiddo, who is using the name Kellen now. Then we followed our Mother's Day tradition of camping. After Pedro's birthday yurt, Kellen and I also stayed in a yurt on the coast for two days and they showed me trails high above the sea at Cape Perpetua. The end of May a bunch of us Belles raced in the Reflection Run and I saw my longtime friend Jamie, who was also participating. I went to Idaho for the first time in so many years, for an All-Class Reunion. I was happy to see a few others from the class of '88.

I continued to get to know Pedro's twins, Liam and Andre, better this year, by doing things together like bowling, skateboarding, watching movies, going to arcades, and playing a lot of Jackbox.tv – games you play using your smart TV and your smart phones together. They enjoyed the Rainier Days 4th of July parade last year, so we did it again this year. I took the kids to the carnival and we played games, browsed things for sale, and ate carnival food. The end of July Pedro & I stayed

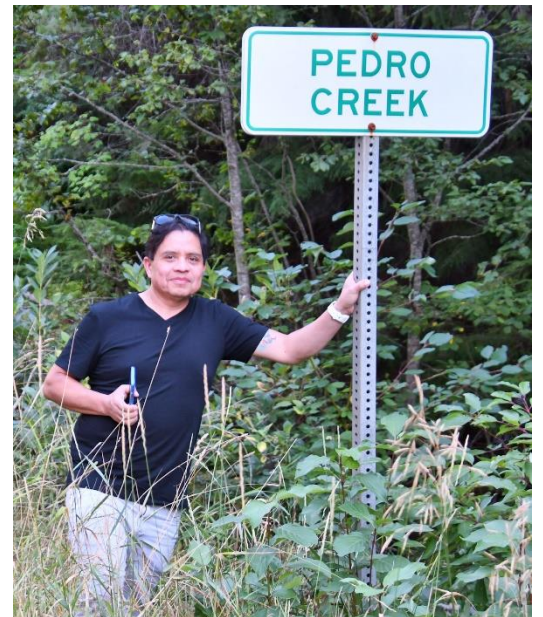


at the McMenamins Edgefield in Troutdale, OR and caught a Michael Franti concert on the grounds. We've got a McMenamins' passport book and we're trying to visit every single establishment, to get passport stamps. I found a new nearby trail and hiked Spruce Run Creek. The end of July, we returned a visit to Ian & Karen in Seattle.

August was the beginning of so much traveling. Pedro was sent to a conference at Duke University in North Carolina examining the uses of artificial intelligence in the medical field. OCHIN allowed me to join him and I explored Durham and Raleigh while Pedro was at the conference. In the evenings we walked to some great restaurants in the American Tobacco Campus and went on a tour of the Duke Lemur Center. Pedro had to give his final presentation over Zoom for his MIT course from the hotel room, and it went smoothly. Pedro came with me to the annual Cherokee Chief's event, which was held in Salem this year. Luckily, he knew Brian and Melissa from our visit earlier in the year and could talk with them while I took off and was a social butterfly for the next three hours, seeing my Cherokee family that I had not seen in person since before the pandemic. That included Robert Lewis, who I was finally able to introduce to Pedro. Robert and I worked this year on getting his stories and illustrations into digital format, which is a fun collaboration. The last weekend in August was the Portland to Coast event for the Belle Brigade, where we relay race 120 miles from Portland to Seaside over two days. Pedro again volunteered for us and helped keep racers on track at one of the exchange points. Once again it was madness, almost no sleep at all, and so much fun. Soon after the race, our captain announced that she would not be able to lead us in 2023, and now *I* am the captain of the team. Wish me luck.

The first week of September, Pedro and I went on a road trip to North Idaho to visit my two stepdads, Robert Perry and Jim Stippich. They both seem well and were happy to see us. On the way north and on the way home again, skies were opaque and orange with wildfire smoke. One big fire was only a few miles from Jim's house and when we drove past it at night, I saw the flames leaping into the sky across whole mountainsides. We crossed the border into Canada and went on a three-day hike into the British Columbia mountains of Valhalla Provincial Park. We were fortunate in that our hike had mostly clear skies. For budgetary reasons, Veterans of Foreign Wars did not schedule a November class this year. Instead, when I taught in September in Annapolis to students in a classroom, there was a camera on me for students attending virtually. I had to learn some new teaching skills for that! For Christmas last year, I bought all of us hot air balloon rides. Kellen and Cameron did their ride in July for Kellen's 25th birthday and my man and I soared over Central Oregon in September.

As October arrived, Pedro and I were in southern Oregon ziplining, exploring Ashland, and attending no less than four plays at the Shakespeare Festival. The following weekend he went bungee jumping while I remained on solid ground and cheered. The weekend after that we took the twins to a corn maze, and yet another weekend we took them to TopGolf. It's fun to have kids to play with. At the end of October, Kellen, Cameron and I flew to Los Angeles for a week at Disneyland. The kids had a lot of fun planning for the trip, including a visit with high school friends who now live in the area, and making a meal plan for the week to manage our budget. We are all Disney fans and had the very best time and I was blown away by the new Galaxy's Edge part of the park. I met up with another Brandeis friend, Pablo, who recently moved to SoCal. It's wonderful that so many of my college classmates are now lifelong friends.



It was a rough employment year for Kellen. They worked at the Carousel Museum most of the year. It was part-time work at minimum wage and simply not enough to live on. While the environment was beautiful and fun in the beginning, listening to carousel music and dealing with wild children (and their often-wretched parents) having birthday parties day after day, was unsustainable. Kellen applied and applied for jobs in 2022, and despite what you've heard in the news, not everyone is eagerly hiring. Sadly, my worries grew so intense that I gave both the kids a hard time and upset everybody. I am so sorry I did that to them, but we patched it up and it did force me to do some more learning and growing. After about six months of searching and interviewing, Kellen finally got the kind of job they were hoping for. It's Assistant Project Manager at a construction/ excavation company, where eventually their geology training can be used. It's full-time with full benefits, at a living wage. Things were so shorthanded at the carousel, at the end Kellen worked all weekend as usual, and worked alone at a special event Sunday night, and Monday morning started a 40-hour work week at a new job! They are still excited to be learning the job and the new career path. At the same time, Cameron was finishing a 35-week intensive Full Stack Java bootcamp with Merit America. It will provide him with a foot in the door, experience with Java and JavaScript, and help applying for positions in the tech field. In the meantime, he works part time at the YMCA.

We flew to Providence, Rhode Island in November to attend the wedding of – yet another – Brandeis friend of mine. It was the first Jewish wedding I had ever attended and the first wedding of a transgender couple, so I felt privileged to be there, as well as excited. It was wonderful to see my dear friend EmFish, and meet everyone else: her spouse Ari, and their parents. Pedro and I stayed a couple of days to explore Providence. The highlight was when we came upon a track team at the Capitol building, racing up and down the marble steps. We threw off our coats and raced with them! The next day we rented a car and drove to Newport and stuffed ourselves on seafood. After that trip, we next flew to Boise to Eli & Addie's house for a few days. They were hosting Thanksgiving with Parker & Paxton, Addie's sister and her two boys, us, and Ian & Karen. It was the first time I had seen Ian & Eli together since Mom died. After ten years, it's about damned time I connect with my four brothers on a more regular basis.

The beginning of December I had stopped travelling and finally had a chance to catch up with friends Sandy, Heather, and Jeanine, all former co-workers at VA. In October, friends Maria and Israel had hosted lunch with me and another friend Jennifer, also friends from our time at VA. Man, I love my friends, and the opportunities we have to laugh together.

Next year there will be some big changes: the twins will graduate from high school and Pedro and I hope to move in together. If you've wanted to visit my parklike paradise out in Rainier, then 2023 is the time to come!

