

Christmas 2024

It's time to condense the entire year of highlights for six people! I want to start by talking about Last Christmas (no, not the song by Wham!), when I went to see my brother Eli, and sister Addie and nephews Parker and Paxton in Boise. I also caught a concert with my friend Marcus Eaton. The boys are so grown up, kind, and smart, both a ton of fun. For my birthday the first week of the year, Pedro and I spent some time in Walla Walla, Washington, to visit my brother Ian and soon-to-be-SIL Karen and see their new house. Yes! Ian proposed this year while they were vacationing in Italy, and after 10 years I have to say not only are we all very excited to have Karen in our family, but also it's about damned time.

For Valentine's Day, *The Oregonian* did a story about relationships that formed because of the sister city connection between Ashland and Guanajuato, Mexico, which includes Pedro and me! They ran our photo on the cover. For Pedro's birthday at the end of February, Pedro and I stayed in a single private yurt with a hot tub on the edge of Tillamook Bay, which was pretty romantic.

In March I went on a road trip to visit my beloved friend Marlene who moved a couple of years ago. On the first and last nights in Arizona, I stayed with Bill and Mikki Grady that we knew from Vermont! Marlene spoiled me with treats and advice and good conversation. From there I visited my cousin David in Tucson, and was ecstatic to hike with him into all his favourite desert spots for wildlife photography. As Spring advanced, Pedro and I continued to find ways to get outside. We both always want to go for a walk. Near our home, we have a couple of great trails, and one of them leads to a pub!

I was especially active with my Cherokee family this year, taking a two-day Cherokee history course, a hike out to a sacred Wishram pictograph site in the Columbia River Gorge, learning to basket-weave with a Cherokee National Treasure, and having a long conversation with Chief Hoskin when he came to Oregon from Oklahoma this summer. My volunteer work on the Mt. Hood Cherokees newsletter Talking Leaves and Election Committee continues, and I feel closer than ever to Native life and Native concerns. Pedro has Aztec heritage and his boys have Wiyot from their mother, so we also attended Mayan and Aztec events with them.

In April I taught in Annapolis for VFW once more. When my airplane approached the Baltimore airport, I saw the destroyed Francis Scott Key bridge. I taught again in September and this time my friend Sandy was also hired, so we got to spend the week together. Another instructor friend, Vicki, and I worked together to request for a pay raise (the first time I ever tried this), and it worked! We built a beautiful workshop for Pedro in the back yard. His very first project was to build an island with an extending tabletop that his tablesaw fits into. He hopes to take a welding class next year and add that to his work out in the shop. Pedro's plans are to build and fix things for the property.

The twins turned 19 in May, then finished up a successful first year at



Parker & Paxton &



Ian & Karen in Italy



Cuz David



Liam & Andre



Karen, Ian & us



Bill & Mikki

Portland Community College. Liam remains true to his goal of becoming a marine animal veterinarian one day. Andre decided to work instead. He volunteered to assist with school kids over the summer, then he volunteered at his dentist's office. The end of May I went to New Meadows, Idaho to celebrate the retirement of our teacher Jeff Parnett. I stayed with my sister Nikki and her kids and it felt good to check in with them after the sudden loss of Jason last year. I got to see my step-mom Kathy too. I had a blast of a solo road trip on the way home, stopping at the Kam Wah Chung museum in John Day, and hiking at the Painted Hills. In May we stayed at the McMenamins Olympic Club in Centralia, Washington, and in August we stayed at the Oregon Hotel McMenamins in McMinnville. It's one of the fun things we like to do for fun, and luckily there are still hotels left for us to explore.

The story that did not stop all year was getting to know our new property! Our pretty yard has Asian pear, apple, and fig trees, and blueberry bushes, all of them loaded with fruit. I worked my butt off to make the vegetable gardens produce. We learned much and next year's garden will be even better. Some highlights: the jalapenos, serranos, poblanos, and habaneros all thrived. Our corn grew like gangbusters, but was ravaged by squirrels. We had many volunteer squashes and gourds that produced fruit, to include the pumpkins we carved for Halloween. We were practically overrun by sunflowers planted by the squirrels, but they made the garden really beautiful. We both spend time with our eight chickens and I update TikTok with their antics.

In June All four of us met with Curt and Peggy at the Tillamook Forestry Center when our friends came back to Oregon after recently moving away. We took Andre to Universal Studios in Hollywood while Liam stayed at home and visited a water park with his mom. My Brandeis friend Pablo met us at the airport and showed us around Hermosa Beach before we left for our hotel. It was my first time at USH and Andre absolutely loved the brand-new Super Nintendo World and we had a blast with him. Pedro's favourite part of the park was Simpsons Land and mine was Harry Potter's Wizarding World. In the summer warmth, we tried to learn our new town better, attending the hot air balloon festival, and discovering a farmer's market walking distance from our house. Liam likes to skateboard, so we take him to the trails near the house almost every time that the boys come visit.

We spent the Fourth of July camping in southern Oregon at Fish Lake near Lake of the Woods with friends Margaret and Allen. It was dreadfully hot, but we had the lake to cool off in and had a marvelous time together. Kellen turned 27 in July, the same weekend we returned to Walla Walla. Eli's family came in their RV, and we converged on Ian and Karen's house. The best parts were Eli's brisket and when the



Twins, us, Peggy & Curt



Pedro & me



Pedro with the hens



Liam & Andre

ladies went to Karen’s favourite winery and sat outside in the 100+ heat. Andre has been practicing his driving, as both boys got their drivers licenses this year. This motivated Pedro to give his old Camry to the boys and get a new car!! He loves the hybrid Toyota RAV4.

I tagged along with Pedro on a work trip to Atlanta for the first time, enjoying some outstanding food, Olympic Park, and the Botanical Garden despite the miserable August weather. Later in the year he had a conference in New York City. It was his first time there, so he extended his flight home by a day and explored Manhattan on foot. He especially liked the New York Public Library, and the area around it, including Rockefeller Plaza. He visited Central Park, went to the top of the Empire State Building, and said Times Square was “Cool, but it was too much.” I’m pleased to report that my second year of being team Captain of the Belle Brigade in the giant Portland to Coast race went great. It’s a tough job, though, and I handed off the reigns to Alexandra who will be our fearless leader next year. Pedro and I finished off the month with a concert to see Counting Crows open up for Santana, who Pedro first saw when he was a teenager. Santana’s band was awesome, and the man is still a helluva entertainer. That and Thievery Corporation were the only concerts we saw this year.

We made time mostly for local friends this year, but Madhawa was at a conference in Portland, so we got to meet him for dinner one evening. Pedro meets periodically with former co-workers, to keep up those relationships. His job as a Data Scientist continues to demand much from him, which would be more of an issue but he loves so much about it. He detests the constant meetings, though. His employer, OCHIN, supports personal development, and Pedro plans to continue his education with machine learning. My personal development this year involved a lot of therapy, as my skills needed a refresher. One goal is to reduce my commitments. I have been trying to avoid attending plays and performances most of the year for that reason, but I did see Black Violin with my girlfriend Heather, and two Broadway shows (Carole King and Patsy Cline) with Patricia, a fellow Cherokee.

Liam particularly loves River Otters but had never seen the famous otters at the High Desert Museum in Bend. Last month we all spent a weekend down there to enjoy the fabulous museum with the awesome otters, as well the Bend Riverwalk and Pilot Butte. We had a painful loss this year when our cat, Racecar, died on Thanksgiving Day. She was 18 years old and it was time for her to go, but it was still so sad, especially for me, because she had been my sole companion for years before I met Pedro.

Kellen is still working for Just Bucket in Albany, assisting the Project Managers. They are not planning to work their entire career



Luigi, Andre, Pedro, Mario



Pedro & Andre at USH



Pedro & RAV4



Cherokee Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr.



Liam's wingspan

in construction and excavation, but for the time being are eager to soak up all this great experience in site management, compliance, coordination and communication. Cameron continued all year at the Mid-Willamette YMCA, but in 2025 is moving on to the next chapter in what we all expect will be a more supportive and satisfying environment. When Kellen and Cameron get breaks in their schedule, they go to the coast which they both love. Their big splurge of the year was the extended Labor Day weekend at Portland's anime convention called Kumoricon. Other big news is that they moved into a bigger apartment in Albany and invited a friend from Texas to join them as a roommate. A special treat for me is when Kellen has work in Portland and surprises me with an invitation to join them for lunch.

Today construction begins on my backyard office. For a year, Pedro and I have been shoulder to shoulder every single day in our shared office. It's time to separate us! It's tiny and simple, so hopefully soon after we get home from New Zealand the office will be ready for me to use. All year we have been staying home and saving money and Pedro has been stockpiling vacation time, because we are joining a 2-week guided Lord of the Rings tour in New Zealand just after the New Year. We will visit movie sets for LOTR, the Hobbit, and the TV series Rings of Power, and learn about how they were made and meet people who worked on them. The only other news late in the year is that we have created little squirrel monsters by teaching the backyard squirrels to take peanuts from our hands. Even Liam now succumbs to their demands.

I almost got this far without an impassioned message. I could write four more pages on the things that Pedro and I have talked about since the election. The most important one is this: Pedro and I are parents of transgender children, who are beautiful people constantly putting more good into the world. They are the better future of America and we are proud of them, and proud to support them. We are also scared for their safety. I implore you to join us in protecting, loving, and valuing transgender Americans.



Racecar



Kellen



Cameron & Kenma



Pedro, Mads, me



Karen, Addie, me



Belle Brigade at the finish



Kellen