



Christmas 2013

Sending the Hallahan Annual Report Your Way...Along with Holiday Greetings,

The abbreviated recap of our year includes a dreadfully long winter, a painfully short season at the lake, a jumbled fall (at least for Jean) with too much to do and too few days above freezing to winterize gardens effectively, and a Christmas season that began too early!

But there's more ... here's the rest of the story ... We began the New Year at our lake cottage. People raised in serious weather should have more patience with serious weather! But even back in Colorado, in the mostly mild-weathered foothills, winter tried everyone's patience last year. Kirk escaped for a short conference in Florida (which has become somewhat of a tradition – he's going back in 2014.)

Oh that grandbaby!... March found us sneaking between storms to spend Spring Break up north. We visited with Jenna, Jon and Atticus and rekindled our “baby holding-cuddling-feeding” skills. Adorable doesn't even come close to describing this little guy.

Some things never change... Jean still gardens like a crazy lady. She works feverishly to leave our yard in Colorado planted with annuals, drip irrigation system fine-tuned, to provide plenty of color when we return in September. Once we got beyond the May 1 blizzard (another 10” of snow), spring blossomed with a grand flurry of garden duty, graduation entertaining for Jean's friend, Jane Peters, and packing for the lake as well as a trip to Europe.

Ready or not...travel... June was nuts! We had two weeks to whip off furniture dust covers in the cottage, restock the frig, rake and mow, and do some speed-gardening. On June 16, we were on a plane for Europe—our first trip abroad in (gulp!) 31 years! (the Prince Charles and Lady Diana wedding was happening!). We loved Kew Gardens, Greenwich village and eating fish and chips five times. Jean followed a guide book, discovering amazing London markets. Remember Portobello Market from the Mary Poppins movie? Wonderful shopping! Kirk even managed to attend two sessions of the conference where he presented a research paper. The highlight was probably High Tea at The Savoy Hotel!



Jean and Kirk in Bournemouth, June 2013

Our itinerary included a second conference at the University of Bournemouth in southwest England, but first we made quick train trip through the Channel to northern France. We took a colleague's recommendation to not miss Chantilly -- a quiet, quaint retreat just north of Paris, and home of famous chateaus and a fabulous equestrian museum. Jean's still trying to figure out exactly how their local “whipping cream” becomes Chantilly Crème. Whipping cream just doesn't do that on this side of Atlantic! On the tail end of the trip, we drove through southern Ireland, visiting Cork, Killarney and experiencing amazing scenery (along with the

hazards of driving on the “wrong” side of the road) along the western and southern shores of the Atlantic. Sorry, no pictures--digital camera got too full and dumped our memories into the ozone!

A trip to Ohio... “Nuts” continued through July! Back at the lake for a short time, we practiced our unpack-and-repack skills and hit the road for a Laidman family reunion near Cleveland, etc. We dropped through some of our favorite places – Minneapolis, Madison and Chicago – en route. The reunion was a reprise of the event featured in our 2011 Christmas letter—with more cousins and relatives from Kirk’s extended family in attendance. Amazingly, all 15 cousins, now age 49 to 69, are still alive and healthy!

Of moving vans and baby proofing... And August was NUTS! What happened to a leisurely summer at the lake! Two weeks before returning to campus, Kirk went into high gear, helping Jenna and Jon move to our lake house from their apartment an hour away in Grand Forks. The kids turned our lower level into a comfy apartment, escaping rising rents in North Dakota in favor of saving money for a move to a larger community to chase better jobs and educational opportunities. Grandma Jean came to the rescue for baby holding.

Consuming passions... By mid-August, Kirk was back to work teaching and conducting a faculty search, among some extra duties. Jean returned from the lake in September and promptly dove into remodeling our front flower bed, having a tree stump ground out and planting 900+/- tulip and daffodil bulbs. Oh, that obsessive-compulsive gardening gene! She dashed back to garden in Minnesota but sadly found too few days above freezing to work in the yard beyond the bare minimum. She quilts, sews, knits and works tirelessly with women in recovery. By helping hurting women dig out of deep pits of emotional turmoil, lost opportunities, broken relationships and unhealthy choices, Jean keeps her own demons in check. Jean still feeds her soul and fills her life with long walks with constant companion, Chewy.

Retirement...it’s just a word... Jean turned 65 on December 9 and frowns routinely at the mountain of Medicare-related mail she gets. With very few gray hairs (really!!) and a host of youngish friends, the only question is where she’ll be pressing her luck gardening with her awful knees. Kirk, who will be 64 in February, inches toward retirement. June 2018 is his target date -- at least for now. We’re keenly aware that downsizing to one house might be a reality. Hmmm...lake life or life minus the lake?



Atticus (13 months)

Over the miles and through the snow, to Grandma and Grandpa’s house they go... We will be home in Colorado for the holidays, hosting Jenna, Jon and Atticus here for about 10 days beginning December 22. Atticus started walking two days before his first birthday (November 9)—and is now a fast-moving target. At Thanksgiving, the kids checked out Phoenix, where Jon’s parents live, as a possible landing place. Now it’s time for Colorado to turn on the charm and help Jenna and Jon see if their dreams might come true here.

More is better... Although Jean’s always believed that motto, it’s hard to see where “more” would fit in our lives. Age has helped us settle into a philosophy suggesting each day’s sunrise and sunset are the bookends holding amazing opportunities. The trick is to notice the opportunities and be willing to set aside some of our very important daily plans to walk into what Jean calls our “God jobs,” the places where God needs us to be that day. It’s a process and must surely take a lifetime!

Blessings of the season from our house to yours,