



Happy Holidays from the Hallahans - 2021

2021 was certainly a major improvement over 2020. Although some Covid-inspired peculiarities linger, we are grateful for the predictabilities, in particular, the calendar. Covid has changed the way we shop but not the fact that Christmas still falls in December -- and with it comes our annual recap and best wishes for the holidays.



Jean and Kirk in Oak Glen, CA, November 2021. Kirk and the "Bumble Bee" All of us decked out in matching patriotic t-shirts for Maple Lake's July 4 Golf Cart Parade.

Winter in Minnesota. In last year's letter, BC was our shorthand for before Covid. Now it's our code word for because of Covid. BC (Because of Covid) we stayed put in Minnesota for the winter. With everything buttoned up tight in California, rattling around in 1,500 square feet with nowhere to go didn't offer much appeal. No one could have predicted how smart that was. We enjoyed what the weatherman called a very mild, "soft winter" -- a term the natives had never heard before to describe a season with unseasonably mild temperatures and almost no snow.

Kirk became consumed with genealogical research into Jean's family and his mother's family, the Laidmans. He sorted and scanned several hundred photos, dug electronically for bits of people's lives back through 125 years and wrote a series of narratives for each family. His work is tidily compiled on FamilySearch.org, an online family history website, and on our own website (hallahan.info/Families). When necessary, as these projects plodded on, he attended to his online history of media class for CSU.

Jean spent much of the winter de-constructing more recent family scrapbooks and albums, tossing out a bazillion duplicate prints and dumping boxes of negative envelopes...and we're saving these? WHY????

Predictably, though, there is no such thing as DONE. There is prettying up to do and the recipients of ALL the originals remain to be identified.

In March, as the Covid situation appeared to dissipate, we masked up and flew to California for a quick visit to check our mobile home, see friends, and enjoy a bit of heat and sunshine. It felt very peculiar to absorb news stories of exhausted healthcare workers and hospital services stressed to the max and yet to feel safe enough to travel thanks to early vaccinations for both of us and, now, boosters. It's still a bit scary.

Spring Came Early. With no snow on the ground the end of March we were motivated to go test drive a few golf carts. Our teeth were chattering from cold, but we were determined to find a new lake life toy -- mostly for then 8-year-old Atticus -- while supplies lasted. It was love at first sight for Jean who's always wanted a golf cart to putter around the lake neighborhood. No, Atti can't legally drive the cute, cute, CUTE yellow and black "Bumble Bee." But we play a game called Driving Lessons with him taking the wheel to practice safely off-road in a nearby roadside park. All the skills we taught him chauffeuring us regularly in the pontoon seem to have translated to four wheels. We logged at least five rides and "lessons" many days last summer.

Extraordinary Summer for Lake Lovers. Everything about summer is pretty predictable for us. We dig, plant, irrigate, weed, mow (repeat) with a vengeance. This year, lovely sunny, dry days morphed into serious drought for the farmers and daily deep watering for gardeners. Those of us with lake pumps for



Atticus at a helm of the pontoon on Maple Lake; Jenna and Atticus at Family Weekend; Laidman cousins Kirk, Jack, Donna and Jay

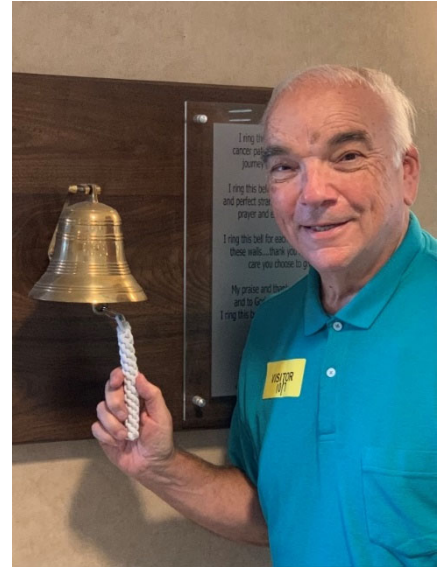
irrigation feared we were responsible for lowering the lake level by many inches. While we had plenty of water when we hosted the Sheppard Family Weekend, by the end of August we risked having to push the pontoon off the lift -- and barely made it off by motor power. And that was the end of boating season with a month of beautiful weather to go. Just not fair!!

A late summer highlight was a first-time Minnesota rendezvous with three of Kirk's cousins and their spouses at Itasca State Park, the preserve for the headwaters of the Mississippi Rivers, only 75 miles southeast of our lake home. We were delighted to see Jack and Deborah Armstrong from Cleveland and Jay and Rachel Simler from Bowling Green, OH, along with Donna (Jack's sister) and Jim Thomas, who now live near their daughter in the St. Cloud area.

Fall...Silver Linings in the Covid Cloud. In the last months of the year, we celebrated many returns to normal. Atticus and Jenna had chugged through his entire second grade year with distance teaching at home and daily parent prodding. Both survived and were beyond thrilled when in-person school resumed.

Outdoors, plant life seemed not to care about Covid. The pumpkins and herbs we planted in May flourished and we harvested some beauties to carve and display for Halloween. Then, Jean turned a small mountain of basil into pesto for the freezer. Added to all this Covid-free joy, Kirk rang the bell at the Altru Cancer Center, a ceremonial milestone for patients deemed cancer-free after five years.

What hasn't returned to normal is Jean's sense of taste and smell as a result of a mild case of Covid 14 months ago. Eating...and cooking...are a bit boring. A friend summed up her situation perfectly, "Oh, you're eating by memory." Yup. She enjoys food because she remembers what it tasted like. That's not all bad. A few pandemic pounds have melted away but Kirk would tell you he's suffering.



The product of Jean's summer gardening included amazing heaps of basil as well as beautiful pumpkins she and Atticus grew for Halloween. Kirk ringing the bell at the Altru Cancer Center

In November, we drove back to California with a stopover in Fort Collins, arriving in Hemet just in time to share turkey and pumpkin everything with friends. We'll be with dear friends here for Christmas Eve and Day as well.

We humans truly were created for face-to-face relationships. We're so grateful that now we can be human and be together with some measure of safety even though life with Covid may be our new normal. Electronic communication has been better than nothing in this peculiar social drought but that brand of relationship hasn't gone far to feed our souls.

From our house to yours, we hope you're safe and well connected with folks as you celebrate the miracle and magic of Christmas during these unsettling times.

--Jean and Kirk