



Happy Holidays from the Hallahans ... 2023-2024

During our first five years after Kirk retired in 2017, we enjoyed a predictable routine. We wintered in California and returned each May to Minnesota, where Jean happily dove into the garden, worked the kinks out in yoga, quilted, and saw the kids and friends regularly. Meanwhile, Kirk completed honey-do projects, dawdled with a book manuscript, and updated his History of Media online course for Colorado State to keep up with the times.

Then, in May 2023, Jean was in a minor car accident and in September she took a nasty fall during an evening dog walk. Both incidents, particularly the cracked pelvis that resulted from the fall, made most of her tasks and errands just about IMPOSSIBLE and doubled Kirk's responsibilities. To his credit, he graciously takes directions in both the kitchen and the garden pretty well. We managed to get to and from California for the 2023 holidays and the first half of 2024. But, not surprisingly, the 2023 Christmas letter never happened.

Hold on; there's more.

An MRI earlier this year to pinpoint Jean's lingering neck pain from the accidents revealed a mass in a parotid salivary gland in her cheek. She'd felt nothing and it caused no pain. The ENT surgeon recommended removal; the resulting biopsy confirmed a slow-growing B-cell (non-Hodgkin's) lymphoma. This month is all about testing to see if the cancer is elsewhere in her body.

Then...the pre-surgery CT scan, ordered as a road map for the surgeon, pointed out evidence of Sjögren's (SHOW-gruns) Disease. This auto-immune syndrome affects fluid-producing glands, and apparently often produces lymphoma. As it turns out, Sjögren's (and/or lymphoma) might explain several annoying symptoms Jean has complained to her doctor about for years -- chronic fatigue and joint pain, dry eye, and dry mouth. There is no cure for Sjögren's, only symptom management.

By August, before Jean's diagnoses, we were keenly aware that we needed to re-examine our lifestyle and to downsize. Gardening had become harder for Jean most days, and Kirk was ready to stop lawn mowing and schlepping garden trash. One day in August, quite spontaneously after receiving an alert from a real estate agent, we put in an offer on a single-level patio home with two bedrooms and a den in an established development in Grand Forks – the town nearest us where Jean grew up and daughter Jenna and grandson Atticus live. By that evening our offer was accepted. The community boasts lovely mature trees and plantings. Jean – a petunia-packer's daughter -- simply would never be happy in new construction on a "bald" lot.

As of this writing we're still in Minnesota as renovations on our unit near completion. We've been living on "contractor time" and have delayed our annual departure for California until early January, but without fully moving in. The lake house is listed and will most likely sell in the spring when folks get itchy for the summer lake life.

All of us will miss our little slice of paradise. The garden has been Jean's happy place, and she's more than reluctant to leave it. Our 12-year-old grandson is bemoaning the loss of whizzing down back roads during "driving lessons" on the golf cart and being the designated pontoon driver (literally since the age of 5). Kirk will miss the morning view and being escorted around the lake on the pontoon. The dog child, Bentley, will miss his freedom to chase the chipmunks. He is so cute, but so fast and a menace to wildlife. And, daughter Jenna sighed, shrugged and lamented she just thought we'd be here forever. What we won't miss is the hour-long drive to major shopping, Jean's quilt group, doctoring and entertainment events. We are privileged to have had 20 treasurable years on Maple Lake.

We've made lots of decisions and taken lots of actions -- and yet there is much that's out of our control. We are trusting that God's got us covered, for our health, for the transition to town, and for the crazed state of the union and much of humanity. God simply asks that we keep trusting, choose well and love the people around us. Keep the faith, friends. Let's keep in mind the prophetic words of an oval decal that fell out of a random box we were emptying to pack for the move, "It's All Good."

Jean and Kirk + Bentley



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