
JANICEK CHRISTMAS



Merry and bright and everything is alright!

Merry Christmas, and we hope this year's newsletter finds you blessed and bright. It's amazing that a whole week has already passed since I wrote the last newsletter. I know it hasn't been a week, but it feels like it.

2024 for us has been a humdinger. A real hootenanny. And here I am, reflecting on it all. It's hard to reflect on the past year in my head because I'm getting old. I went through some years where I'd find myself having walked into a room and then forget why I even walked into that room. There were a couple times when I'd find myself in the bathroom with my zipper pulled down and forget why I was in that room. Thankfully I could put two-and-two together on that endeavor. I told Elise if she finds me at the mailbox with my zipper pulled down then it's time to put me in the home. Right now I'm at that stage in life where I'll be sitting on the couch and be inspired by an immediate chore or task, I'll stand up to tend to the task, and then find myself trying to remember why I even stood up in the first place.

Funny stuff aside, this year has been, for yours truly, in a word, hard. The tone was set in mid-January when I was fired from my job at the local run club. I'd never been fired from a job before so it really stung. What stung even more is that I was fired for unsubstantiated reasons. I'll spare you the gory details, but over the course of the following 5 months there was a lot of anger and frustration, and eventually a hearing with the

Texas Workforce Commission. Yours truly won but it made for a very stressful first half of the year and was a stark reminder to go with my gut when something's not right, especially with workplace management.

I started a new job in mid-June and was quick to put all of those aforementioned frustrations behind me. Until I reminded myself of them for the sake of this newsletter.

And now I'm all pissed off again and I was going to stand up and kick my chair but then I forgot why I stood up.

Elise celebrated her 1-year anniversary at Wilson Roofing this past October. You should see her now. She's so tan and muscular from all of the roofs that she's been installing that you wouldn't even recognize her. She was hired on as the receptionist until they realized how muscular she is in the brain and ambition, so they moved her into an account management role where she does things like managing accounts and other account management duties. All I know is that she comes home and has all kinds of office antics to recount. Things like ugly sweater contests, toilets nearly overflowing, and customers and coworkers who tell her that they really appreciate her.



This year was a tough one for us as parents as we sent Maly off to college this past August. Steve (Elise's dad) always reassures that we've given her strong roots and wings, and while Elise and I are confident that we've done a pretty okay job in raising her, it's still just so damn hard when your child moves away. I know Elise and I share many feelings and emotions, but we still had and have our own. I think we both began our "grieving" early in Maly's senior year of high school when we knew the inevitable was nearing. I think Elise did a better job of processing her emotions over a longer period of time throughout the school year. I also had many of my own moments and opportunities, but it really hit me hard after we dropped her off in Charleston, WV, came back home, and were thrust back into "normal" life. I was a weepy, emotional, depressed wreck for weeks after we left her. I'm doing much better now, but it took me a really long time to get to this point. More time than I'd honestly anticipated.

All of my sappy emotions aside, Maly is doing really well in college. She was recruited to play Division II women's lacrosse, so she had a community and friend group going into her college experience. Lacrosse is a Spring sport, but the Fall semester included lots of practices, workouts, and scrimmages. She's doing great academically as well. She has already changed her major from nursing to business. She's learning to navigate life as an adult and make big decisions and we think she's doing a damn good job of it. I guess we did do kind of an okay job with that whole roots and wings thing.

Mara started the 7th grade this year and is still our little loving and adorable baby. Although she's not so little any more, nor is she a baby. Hell, she'll be a teenager here in a few months. While she is getting



into that teen phase and has become more independent and has her own thoughts and opinions and ideas on things, she remains her agreeable and easy-going self. She's always been really good about going with the flow and taking life as it happens, and while I'm bad about telling her, I greatly admire that quality about her and she sets a really good example for me.



The age difference between our daughters didn't really make for a close sister relationship as children, but when they said "goodbye" when we were leaving Maly at her dorm in August brought Elise and me to tears. It really hit Mara when it was time for that final hug goodbye. The girls both laughed in acknowledging that they both didn't think it would be so hard to say goodbye to each other, and Mara was still crying in the van as we finally drove away. Being the young stoic that she is, she lightened the collective mood by telling us that she was excited to finally have the bathroom all to herself.

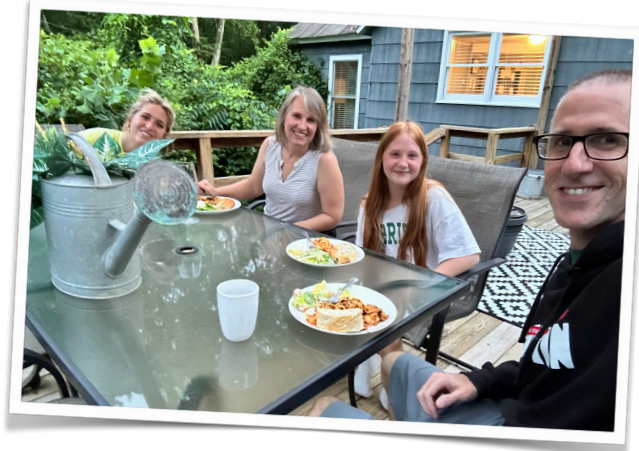
Mara still plays lacrosse for Southwest Area Girls Lacrosse and her season will be starting back up in February. Seventh grade is always when middle school gets more difficult and demanding and she's been feeling it, but she's been doing great and learning how to adapt. There have been times when Elise and I will start getting concerned about academics, organization and executive functioning, and then Mara will just get it all taken care of. Mara's independence is her own, and Elise and I have to remind ourselves of that while we continue to do our job with that whole roots and wings thing.

The family dynamic is obviously different now with just the three of us in the house, and I don't think we've quite settled into whatever the new normal is. This whole year has been met with all kinds of new. Elise and I both started new jobs. Maly moved 1,200 miles away for college. Mara became the only child in the house. And both cats now have osteoarthritis.

I don't think I've mentioned the pets in a Christmas newsletter in a long time. We've had Loki (orange tabby), Mac (gray tabby) and Blue (Australian cattle dog/Husky mix) for well over a decade now. Elise and I are getting old and the pets are getting old too. Both cats have osteoarthritis. We've always kept the cat food up high, on the far side of the bar in the kitchen so the dog won't eat their food. Now we have to lift both cats up to the bar so they can eat because they can no longer jump up. They both have old and tired back legs. Mac has diabetes, so we have to give him 4 units of insulin twice daily. I always joked that if we had pets that required that much maintenance I'd take them out to the pasture, which is really our tiny little suburban backyard. But they're our pets, which means they're part of the family and, well, I don't think there's really anything more important than family. I'd probably build little scooters for the cats if they get to the point where they can't use their back legs any longer.



I admittedly put off writing this Christmas newsletter this year. I always become very conscious of it when thoughts and discussions of Halloween start to surface. And that's when I start to think about how arduous the task is to recount everything that's happened in the past year. I always joke about how bad my memory is and how I can't even remember what I did yesterday, but that's just me making light of the truth. So I'll start to go through the photos that I've taken in the past year. And then that makes me all distracted and nostalgic and sappy. And many of the photos that I've taken often don't have context, so then I'll start scrolling through my Facebook account to see what all we've done in the past year. And then I'll get mad at myself for not posting more stuff on Facebook, but I'll remind myself that people who purportedly know more stuff about life than I do say that social media is bad and is a waste of your time. At that point, many hours, hell, probably days have gone by and I've forgotten why I was looking at all of my photos and Facebook posts from 2024 in the first place. And then before I know it, it's time to rush and cram in the last bit of day job work, schedule that groan-worthy but necessary "I'll be out for the holidays but I look forward to connecting after the New Year. Happy Holidays!" email autoresponder, family comes into town or we have to rush into the logistics of our family's travel, and invariably there's more presents to procure, and then, all of the sudden, it's Christmas morning.



As I type this it's December 29th. I'm really late in authoring the newsletter. I think this is the first year that I didn't write this before Christmas Day. However, I'm one of those that believes in the 12 days of Christmas.



Not so much as a religious observation and the leading up to Epiphany, but because I just really like Christmas. I love Christmas trees, the smell of pine and bald cypress, Santa Claus and his reindeer, presents, stockings, the lights, the Christmas movies, the food and the cookies, the music, and all of the fond memories that I have from my childhood Christmases, and now the many Christmas memories that I've amassed over the years with Elise, our daughters, and our family.

It's December 29th and I'm sitting on the back deck and it's 65 degrees outside. I just got bit by a mosquito on

that meaty part between my thumb and forefinger on my left hand. Christmas Eve and Day have come and gone, just like any other date on the calendar. It didn't feel like Christmastime outside on its eve or day this year in Austin as it was unseasonably warm. It doesn't feel like Christmastime outside right now. It's Sunday afternoon and it's back to work for Elise and me tomorrow. If I'm being honest, I'm suffering from the Sunday Syndrome. I don't want to go back to work and "normal" tomorrow. I'm dreading it. I want Christmastime to stay. But I know it can't. The days will continue to come and go faster and faster, as they all seem to do nowadays, and another Christmas will be here before I know it, and I need to remind myself to

Christmas playlist on Spotify and I let it play quietly in the background while I wrote. A song entitled "Christmas Always Finds Me" caught my ear, so I'll leave you with a lyric that spoke to me. It's a little reminder to lean on faith and love during the holidays.

"When silver bells and silent night
And mistletoe's nowhere in sight
With no chance of snow falling down
Another year older
Little harder to believe
But somehow Christmas always finds me"

We hope this Christmastime is merry, bright and full of love and happiness for you and yours.

With our love and gratitude,

Jack, Elise, Maly & Mara