

The 28th Annual Barnett/Steves Christmas Letter!

Hello and welcome back to the mirth and merriment of the yearly report of our escapades! Are you ready to crack up laughing while your family looks at you quizzically? Well, let's get started!

I still work for Pages of Life Consulting. I continue to visit various nursing home communities and help them improve their services. Each year we run a booth at the annual convention for the Colorado Health Care Association. The owner could not attend this year so I was asked to run the booth and it was an exciting and tiring three days. On the side, I have continued to sub at the kids' school over the last year. I enjoy it and it has been an eye opening experience. Middle school is tough. I have found that I have to stay one step ahead of those kiddos. I have to be very strict. One boy asked me, "Ma'am, are you Andrew Steves' mom?" I said yes. He said, "Are you nice to him?" I got a good chuckle out of that one. The teachers have said they like it when I sub because I follow the lesson plan. This left me scratching my head. Apparently, other subs fly by the seat of their pants.

In regards to my health, I had CT scans done of my neck and chest and they came back good so I was very happy. Everything is stable related to my thyroid. In May, I started having ankle pain. I finally saw a podiatrist in the fall and he ran tests and said I had a partially torn tendon in my ankle. I also had a crooked heel bone that needed to be straightened. I also had plantar fasciitis that needed fixed. I made the difficult decision to get it fixed surgically on November 14th. I am healing and I hope to be back to weight bearing soon. Toby has been an incredible support and he has had to take on so much. The kids have also been very helpful. We are blessed to have so many friends and family who have supported us during this time. Thank you all!!

Toby continues to work for the Bureau of Reclamation. He works one day a week from home. He states he likes what he does, but he gets tired of the bureaucracy. He continues to have business trips. I always miss him and wish I could go with him, but he tells me I would not want to go to the places he has to go. Apparently, he goes to the armpit of various states. I didn't realize states had body parts. I try to tell the armpit is better than other parts.

Toby had his wisdom teeth out over the summer. He was a trooper. It's not the same as getting it done when you are in your teens. He developed a dry socket which made things worse. He is still getting used to having space at the back of his jaw.

In February, Toby and I celebrated our 20th anniversary (late-it was in June of 2023) by taking an "Adventures by Disney" trip to California. It was incredible. If you have the ability to do an ABD trip, we highly recommend it. We had two tour guides. We traveled in a group of about 35 people and went to Hollywood first. We had behind the scenes access to the Chinese Theater and El Capitan theater. We ate lunch at Walt Disney's favorite restaurant and were able to sit at his table for pictures. We toured the Walt Disney Concert Hall. We toured Jim Henson Studios. We also toured Walt Disney Studios and Walt Disney Imagineering. We then traveled by bus to Anaheim and saw behind the scenes of a few rides at Disneyland and we saw Walt Disney's apartment. One day we had to meet up at 6:30 a.m. for a surprise by our guides. They took us into the park before anyone else.

We were able to take pictures in the park while it was completely empty. It was surreal. It was the first time we had left the kids alone for a week and they did fantastic! We were so impressed. They gained an appreciation for what we do on a daily basis. We left the kids money for groceries. They decided to eat on the cheap so they could shop for themselves with the rest. Well played kids. We didn't see that angle.

In April, we celebrated Mom's 70th birthday in Glenwood Springs in Colorado. It was a great trip. The kids loved the hot springs. Dad found a hotel for us with two bedrooms, two bathrooms, a kitchen, and a pull out couch. The kids thought it was heavenly to have two bathrooms. Autumn loved sleeping near the kitchen "in case I want a late night snack". Andrew and Autumn enjoyed hitting the gym together at the hotel.

Over the summer, the kids, my parents, and I went to Wichita, KS to see family. It was a very nice vacation. Andrew loved our hotel. He would get up early daily and head down to the lobby to have breakfast by himself and chat with the hotel staff. The kids loved swimming and seeing family. It's always wonderful to see my aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandpa. After the trip to Kansas, we decided to rent a home in the woods on Airbnb and we enjoyed the great outdoors for a weekend. We had a great time. Autumn enjoyed the Jacuzzi tub. All of the kids made crafts and helped with meals. Toby, Autumn, and I went for a hike and we got lost. I was so concerned that Abby and Andrew would be worried about us and we didn't have our phones. We returned an hour later and guess what? The kids did not know we were gone. They were inside doing crafts. I couldn't believe it. Andrew said, "We thought you were playing horseshoes." The horseshoe pit was visible from the window. I said, "You can see the horseshoe pit from here and we were not there!" I would hope they would have looked for us eventually.

Abby turned 18 this year! She is officially an adult! It was a strange transition for us, but we had a great time celebrating with her. She bought her first scratch ticket! Abby graduated in May from Eagle Ridge Academy. It was a proud parent moment for us to watch her walk across that stage. She decided to attend the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley in August. We helped move her into the dorm and that was a very emotional day for all of us. She has two roommates and it is a beautiful room. She registered for 5 classes and one lab and she did great! Her science course was "Introduction to Brewing Sciences". She enjoyed it. She learned the chemistry aspect of beer, had a field trip to a brewery, and was able to brew her own beer. She is excited to have finished her first semester. Abby has had a boyfriend since February. His name is Andrew (gets confusing at times). He is a great guy and treats her well. He is attending Wittenberg University in Ohio. Abby went out to see him in September with Andrew's Mom. I took her out in October to see him and it was a great trip. It was the first time I have been on a trip with just Abby.

Andrew turned 14 this year. He is in the 8th grade. He is the President of the National Junior Honor Society. He is doing very well in all of his classes. He made Honor Roll the first quarter. He started playing Dungeons and Dragons with a group of friends this year and enjoys it. He continues to enjoy video games, playing with Rubik's cubes, playing with Nerf guns, Legos, and thinking about how

to make money. Over the summer, he bought a case of bottled water and ice for about \$10 total. He stood on the street corner and sold it. He made \$86! One gentleman gave him \$50!

Autumn turned 8 this year. She is in the 2nd grade. She is doing very well in school. She has a husband named Rory! They married during recess one day and he even gave her a ring! Toby and I were shocked. We thought she should at least wait until 3rd grade to get married. Autumn loves Barbies, Moana, princesses, unicorns, and dolls. She is very artistic and creative. She also enjoys cooking with me. Her goal is to be a veterinarian when she grows up.

Dad continues to do well with his business. He and Mom took a few trips this year on cruises and to Las Vegas. They have a great time traveling and having adventures. Dad tried ziplining recently and loved it! In June, Dad broke his left ankle in three places. He was discouraged, but faced his surgery and recovery with determination. He has been going to the gym frequently and working out with a personal trainer. A few days after surgery, he was back at the gym. I was impressed. He can lift 100 pounds now! He has also been doing PT. This recovery has been easier than the first and I think it has a lot to do with the hard work he has put into it. Dad has continued to lose weight. We are all proud of him. He was kind and built ramps for the front of my house after surgery. They have come in handy. Dad continues to have fun playing with the grandkids and he and I share funny jokes.

Mom puts her heart into crocheting and continues to make beautiful blankets. She picks new patterns routinely and I am impressed. Each new pattern presents challenges, but she takes it on like nobody's business. She still hits Chipotle daily. Her Chipotle got a new manager who has been asking her for advice on things...like staffing. It's hysterical. She is like his consultant. He bought a new iced tea urn for her to win her over. She loves spoiling the grandkids and playing with them. She and Dad have been great supports for us after my surgery.

Goldy (our fish) turned 11 this year. Abby didn't want to take Goldy to her dorm so Autumn took over the feeding duty. We also got two little frogs in February. We are down to one. Goldy gets along with the frog. One day we caught the frog riding Goldy. It was funny.

And now for the funny sayings...

- Autumn got a stuffed animal at the Brighton Christmas festival. She passed a homeless man and gave it to him. He said, "God bless you little girl." She was so excited. She said, "I've never been blessed by God before!"
- Autumn ordered apples at Wendy's. She noticed the sticker that said, "Serve by 9/26." Autumn said, "What? What's this date? Do I have to return these? Are these apples just to borrow?"
- Abby was helping Autumn with her homework. Autumn needed to name two characters. Abby asked her for names. She said, "Let's go with Rosa and Classic Bob."

- Autumn wanted an Olaf that laughs when you shake it at the store. I said, "How about me instead? I can laugh when you shake me. I like warm hugs and the summer." Autumn said, "Yeah, but Olaf has something you don't." "What?" She then said, "An off switch." Sheesh....tough crowd.
- We were discussing where to go for dinner. Autumn: "I don't care where we go as long as I agree what we decide."
- I wanted to have the kids watch, "Wizard of Oz". Autumn saw the title and said, "The Wizard of Ooze? Ewww...I don't want to watch that. I thought this was supposed to be a good movie."
- I went with Autumn and her classmates to the museum. We were in the gems and minerals exhibit. I told my group about my birthstone. Autumn said, "I know mine! It's ummm...pacifier I think." I told her it's sapphire but I like pacifier better.
- Autumn was in the car and we were behind a truck that said, "Join Our Team" on the back with a phone number. The truck was filled with ladders and lots of equipment. Autumn said, "Join Our Team? I don't want to join their team. It looks like a lot of work!"
- Andrew told Autumn that he thought Abby was her favorite sibling. Autumn said, "Whoa, whoa, whoa. Hold on, now let me stop you right there. I don't have a favorite."
- Autumn learned that her birthday is in September. Yesterday, she said, "Mom, a friend had his birthday today. I wish my birthday was today. Mom, there's no way I can wait until Septuary!"

Holiday Tips:

Abby: "If you want to sleep, then make your dad shovel the snow."

Andrew: "Build a snowman."

Autumn: "Don't expect that many gifts."

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Thanks to everyone for their love and support this year! You all make the easy times fun and the tough times easier.

Love,

Toby, Amy, Abby, Andrew, Autumn

Goldy and Pickles (the frog)