

The 29th Annual Barnett/Steves Christmas Letter!

Well hello there! You're back again? You must really like our Christmas letters! That's great! If you enjoy this letter, be sure to click "like" and "subscribe". Just kidding...just trying to stay up with the times. Go grab a tasty beverage, hunker down, and let's get started!

I continue to work for Pages of Life Consulting. I visit long term care communities across the state and give my thoughts on how to improve upon their current practices. I had one community this year in a neighborhood that wasn't so great. A delivery truck for chemicals for dishwashers showed up, the driver left the rear door open, and people from the neighborhood swarmed the truck to steal chemicals. It was crazy. I don't know how they knew. There must be a neighborhood watch for chemical delivery. There was a staff member outside yelling at them to stop. It wasn't effective. It was a valiant effort though. In April, I took on payroll and invoicing for Pages of Life. I had to learn QuickBooks which took some time, but I got the hang of it. I also continue to substitute teach at Autumn's school. I am learning to stay one step ahead. It keeps me on my toes. I do enjoy it and Autumn likes helping me clean the classroom at the end of the day. She taught to an invisible class at the end of the day one time and didn't want to leave until she was done teaching them how to read a clock. It took awhile. Some invisible kids weren't paying attention and ended up having to miss recess.

Now for my health...the obligatory topic. My thyroid is doing well...staying quiet...not causing any problems. My foot on the other hand (that just made me chuckle...that would be a problem if my foot was on my hand) is a different story. I am still working on my foot recovery from my surgery a year ago. I still have pain and they did an MRI and determined that the tendon is still torn and I have tendonitis in my Achilles which are both contributing to my discomfort. I am back in PT trying to strengthen the tendon and work on stretching out the Achilles. It gets discouraging at times, but I keep at it. I'm trying to get a leg up on the situation (see what I did there?).

Toby continues to work at the Bureau of Reclamation. This year has been challenging for him in a multitude of ways. He has faced many changes in his workplace. I admire him so much because he has persevered through the many challenges because he is proud of the work he does and he knows his value to others who he works with in his field. I am very proud of him. He does an excellent job and he has made a difference for so many people through his work.

In June, we traveled to Wichita, KS to see family. Abby's boyfriend (Andrew) went with us and he had a wonderful time. Toby was excited that for the first time the number of girls and boys in the van was equal. We had fun showing him all the places that are meaningful to us in Wichita. We had great quality time with the family and lots of time in the pool! Andrew is still dating Abby so I guess all those hours in the van together didn't scare him off. He still likes us.

In July, our family stayed at "Great Wolf Lodge" in Colorado Springs. That was a wonderful trip. It was great fun watching the kids climb the climbing wall. The joy on Andrew's face when he climbed to the top of the most difficult part of the wall was awesome. Autumn was a little monkey. She climbed fast! We all did the ropes course and I was proud of myself. My foot did well! We had a great time in the pool. One night while we were there, we surprised the kids with tickets to the "Dude Perfect" show. They loved it. Dude Perfect is known for trick shots and fun antics and the show did not disappoint.

At the end of July, I had an incredible experience. For those of you who don't know, I am a long time fan of Neil Patrick Harris. I learned that he was going to host a fundraiser at his house in the Hamptons. It was for "God's Love We Deliver". It is an organization that makes and delivers meals to those who are homebound and ill. I decided to be bold and attend. A dear friend of mine flew with me to New York and we attended the party. It was an unforgettable evening. Neil greeted us as we walked in, we enjoyed great food and drinks, and the house (from the outside-we weren't allowed inside) was impressive. At the end of the evening, there were entertainers in the pool. I was sitting on the diving board and one actress came over to me and said, "You and your friend should get in the pool with us." I asked if we would get in trouble and she said, "No. They want people to enjoy it." I looked at my friend and decided that I would likely never have this opportunity again. My friend and I grabbed tube floats and got in the pool...in our nice dresses. Everyone clapped and cheered as we got in the pool. I thought more people would get in once we did, but nope. It was just my friend and I floating around with the actresses. One actress asked if we had ever had a drink in the pool. We said no. She had the bartender bring us glasses of sake. I cannot describe the feeling of floating around in a celebrity's pool with a glass of sake. We got out and they brought us towels. After that, many attendees wanted to talk to us. I think we made an impression. After the fundraiser, the contribution coordinator called me and we chatted about that night. She told me she was there and I said, "I don't know if you saw me, but I was the one in the pool." She said, "That was you?!?" I couldn't help but laugh. They have this fundraiser yearly so if I attend next year I think people will remember me! I was so proud of myself for stepping outside of my comfort zone.



In August, we rented a cabin for a weekend. The kids brought craft projects. Abby did scratch art, Andrew worked on a Pokemon needlepoint kit, and Autumn learned origami and finger knitting. We played spikeball. We made S'mores, made puzzles, and swung in the hammocks on the deck. It was a wonderful getaway.

In September, Abby, Autumn, and I went to a Benson Boone concert. Abby and Autumn both enjoy his music. It was a lot of fun. After the show, we walked outside to an area where they said he might come out for a meet and greet. We waited there until 1 in the morning. We were dedicated. I passed the time by trying to keep Autumn awake to meet him. He came out and had to do a quick run down the line and high five fans before driving off to his next show. Abby loved getting a high five from him. Autumn was not as impressed. She said, "We waited until 1 and he only spent a few minutes with us!"

Abby turned 19 this year. She is in her second year at the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley. She is ahead on her credits so she is a Junior. She is majoring in Business. She decided to live at home this year and commute and it has been working well for her. She is doing great in her classes. She received an award for the Dean's Citation for Academic Excellence in the spring. In April, she decided to go to esthetician school because she has always loved skincare. She graduated from that program in September and now has her license. She is hoping to start working in the field next semester. We were her guinea pigs while she was in school. Toby got

a facial, Andrew got a facial (with the promise of a Pokemon card pack), Dad got a facial, and I got a facial/leg wax/arm wax/eyebrow tint/eyelash extension/eyelash lift and tint. It was wonderful to see her so excited. She loved the program. I can't wait to visit her when she is working at a spa! Abby has been dating Andrew almost two years now. We enjoy his company and his parents have become great friends as well. Andrew continues to attend Wittenberg University in Ohio. Abby flew to see him in October by herself. It was her first solo flight. She said the best part was only having to look for one empty seat at the gate and the worst part was having to take all her luggage to the bathroom with her. In October, Abby started coaching volleyball at our recreation center for 8-9 year old girls. Autumn was on her team. It was a thrill to see both my girls out there...a full circle moment. Toby helped Abby with practices throughout the season and he coached one game when Abby was in OH.

Andrew is 15 and he started high school this year. He attends Eagle Ridge Academy where Abby went to school. He really enjoys it and is doing well in school. He has a great friend group. He joined the ESports team. It is a video game team. He selects which game he wants to be proficient in and they play against other high schools in competitions. He has Mondays off from school now and so I take Mondays off. He has been teaching me new card and board games. Andrew also started playing Pokemon competitively at a store called "Do Gooder Games". He loves it and has found a great group of people at the store. He took Driver's Education classes and received his Learner's Permit in November. We have taken him out on the road a few times. He is doing very well! It's still strange to see him in the driver's seat. He continues to like Lego, Nerf, and Rubik's cubes. He plays Lego with Autumn and it's great. They also wrestle, play chase, and run around the house at times.

Autumn is 9 and is in the 3rd grade. She enjoys school...mostly due to the fact there is a leopard gecko named Lava as a class pet. She has been able to hold and feed her. She is eager to have a pet of her own and asks for everything under the sun. The other day she saw an ad with an animated mushroom and said, "Mom, can I have a mushroom as a pet?" I went with Autumn on a field trip to the pumpkin patch this year and that was a lot of fun. It was really foggy and I had a strong fear that I might lose kids in the corn maze, but I came back with all five so that was a win! Autumn was in the school talent show in April as an inflatable dinosaur dancing to "Y.M.C.A.". She took 2nd place! She joined the school chess club this year and has enjoyed it. She tried out for the school musical "Honk!" and landed the lead! She was really excited. She will be playing the role of the Ugly Duckling. She told me, "Be sure and tell everyone I'm Ugly!" Autumn continues to love cooking, playing with dolls, playing pretend, and arts and crafts. She still wants to be a vet when she grows up.

This year I have to brag on my Dad. He started working out daily for 2 hours a day. He can bench press 170 pounds and he does 440 pounds on the leg press! He also has been watching what he eats (not just watching it...he pays attention to calories ☺). He has lost...drumroll please...100 pounds!!! It has been an awesome journey to watch and we are so proud of him. Dad and Mom traveled this year to Spain and Portugal on a cruise. They met amazing friends on the ship and played a lot of trivia with them. Mom attended line dancing classes. They saw La Sagrada Familia which had changed a bit since they last saw it in 1997. They also traveled to Iceland with the same friends and enjoyed their time there as well. They also went to Kansas again to see family. Dad celebrated his 70th birthday in September and traveled to Las Vegas with his brothers and their wives to commemorate the occasion.

This year I have to brag on my Mom too. She was diagnosed with a recurrence of her breast cancer in October. She had to have a single mastectomy and she will start chemo in January. Understandably, it has

been tough, but she is a warrior and I have been so impressed. We are so proud of her. The day after surgery, she walked at the mall and she resumed eating at Chipotle. A few days later, she went out Christmas shopping. We decided she is superhuman. Maybe we should get her a cape. "Super Cindy!" I guess we can't use "SC". That would get all the little kids confused. As with Dad, please keep her in your thoughts and prayers. Our hope is that she can rock this chemo journey with as few side effects as possible...unless glowing in the dark is a possibility. That would be awesome. The human nightlight! Mom continues to trek to her Chipotle daily and she was visiting the one at the mall as well. The one at the mall closed recently and they gave Mom all their straws (she likes their straw type better than the other Chipotle). Mom now has thousands of straws. I am not sure what she will do with them all. I suppose she could make one really long, fun straw to enjoy her iced tea from across the room! Maybe she could spy on people from the upper level of the mall. I just looked it up and apparently you can make straw rockets. That could be entertaining.

Goldy (our fish) is 12 this year. It's insane. Maybe she isn't a fish. Maybe she is an alien spy. She just keeps going and going. Who knew a fish in a little baggie won at an event would live this long? We still also have Pickles the frog. Autumn added a fish named Shiny. It is bright pink and glows under a black light.

And now for the funny sayings...

- Autumn: "You know...they say when life gives you lemons make lemonade, but that is not true because you need more than that. You need water, sugar, a knife, ice..."
- We went out as a family. We came back to the house. Andrew had the key to the door. He, Abby, and Autumn ran ahead of us. Andrew was struggling with the lock. As I approached the front door on my crutch I heard Autumn say, "Andrew what is taking you so long? Even Mom has caught up to us."
- Autumn is watching the Superbowl with us. She just watched Tom Cruise say "Welcome to Superbowl 59". Behind him it said "Superbowl LIX". She said, "Don't you mean Superbowl licks (LIX)?"
- We were at the drive thru for Wendy's. The woman at the window said "hi" and then shut the window. Autumn said, "Did you see that lady who said hi but it didn't look like she meant it on her face?"
- Toby helped me shop for groceries for tomorrow to make fun treats for the kids. I came home, put the groceries away, and Autumn said, "Oh Mom, you bought green bananas for St. Patrick's Day!"
Umm...sure... 🍌
- Autumn was telling me about the parts of a book. "Here is the cover and here is the table of contents and this is the exoskeleton." "You mean the spine?" "Oh yeah...the spine!"
- Abby: "Do you know the top 5 highest grossing movies?" We took guesses. Autumn: "I have no idea the most disgusting movie." Abby: "#1 is Avatar." Autumn: "I haven't seen it, but I have seen ads for it. Yeah...their legs bother me. They are kinda' icky."
- Toby always the dishes and I am so grateful. Tonight there were more than usual. He stared at me with each dish I added to the pile. I asked what was wrong. He said, "What's wrong? I could rob a bank right now and they would think the California Raisins did it because the fingerprints would match!"

- Autumn joined chess club at school. She dug out our chess set at home this morning. She told me we are missing pieces. I told her she could use other items as those pieces (candy, checkers). She said, "No. The white pieces are just going to ask the black pieces if they can help." Oh...ok.
- I took Autumn and Abby to an event today that had prize drawings. I told Abby about how they were going to do drawings for prizes. Autumn got very excited and said, "Ooh! I'm good at drawing. I can do lots of drawings and get lots of prizes!"

Holiday Tips:

Abby: "Don't ask your kids for holiday tips."

Andrew: "In the midst of chaos, there is also opportunity." –Sun-Tzu

Autumn: "If you are going to ask for a pet... it might be a while."

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Thanks to everyone for their ongoing love and support!

Love,

Toby, Amy, Abby, Andrew, and Autumn

Goldy, Pickles, and Shiny