



The Christmas Letter that Wasn't

Written by Jay

The truth is that this letter never went out. It finally didn't happen. For Christmas 2018, Liz and I gave the kids a gift certificate to a Family Life Marriage Conference, which we'd attend with them. They chose the one in Charleston in mid-December 2019. The day we left on that trip, I wound up with a viral sore throat, the symptoms of which didn't relinquish a final hold until the February. So, even though we didn't mail this newsletter with Christmas cards, we wanted to keep up the tradition of writing about the year so that we'd have the ongoing family history.

January. That's a good thing because Alabama got spanked by Clemson in the January 2019 game. We're writing late enough that the January 2020 game is in the books as well, with LSU having the first 15-0 season ever and beating Clemson in the championship. The 2019 Season did shine on us in some ways. After being on the Alabama **season ticket** waiting list for about ten years, my name came up, and I purchased front row tickets, although it was the front row in the corner of the upper deck. My plan was to sell enough of the big tickets to break even and then to have a shot at face-value post-season tickets. With Alabama falling to LSU and Auburn in 2019, the post season was irrelevant, but it was fun to see Alabama beat Michigan in the Orange Bowl without Tua Tungaviloa, who missed the last few games.

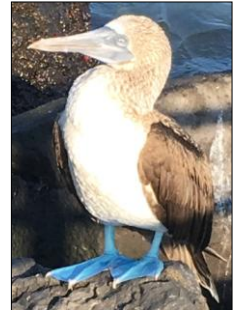


College Football – This was the first year in a few that Andy and I haven't been able to go to the college football championship game in



National Award – I had the privilege of being recognized by my peers as *Distinguished Leader of the Year* by the *Baptist Association of Christian Educators*, a national professional association of education/discipleship pastors. Their annual conference was at Hunter Street Baptist Church this year, so Liz got to attend the presentation as well. It was an honor that Topper Reid, who had been a mentor to me many years before, presented the award.

Disciple-making Takes Center Stage – Liz and I both were engaged in disciple-making this year. Other than small groups, we're discovering the power of very small, same-gender groups with high relationship and encouragement. If you look at Jesus' disciples, you see that he actually spent more time with Peter, James, and John, than with the entire group. I have been convinced of the power of this kind of discipleship through his interviews with potential small group leaders at Brook Hills. Many of the young men who are now serving were discipled well in college by organizations such as Campus Crusade, Navigators, and Campus Outreach.



Galapagos Islands – After many years of leading mission trips to Ecuador, Liz finally got to lead a trip to the Galapagos Islands. I have long been enamored with the **Blue Footed Booby**, so I was delighted when Liz sent this picture from just outside her hotel room. It's always fun to watch the flight tracker to see where she is. Liz still has two part-time jobs with e3 Partners: a trip leader and a medical office administrator here in Birmingham.



Trip #2 with the Smithermans – To start the year, we made a trip with

Tom and Glenda Smitherman to the Holy Land Experience in Orlando. On the way down, we visited Silver Springs in Ocala, Florida. We walked the boardwalk above the swamp and came back the next morning for the glass-bottom boat ride. While there, we had dinner with Dale and Cindy Jarrell, friends from seminary years.



Three MLB Cities in One Trip – I have a bucket-list goal of seeing a major league game in all 30 MLB cities. Two of the remaining cities were Detroit and Toronto. While poking around on Travelocity.com, I found a round trip from ATL to Detroit for about \$100, so worked that out. A little further research showed that I could leave one day earlier and fly from ATL to Denver and back, just in time via a true red-eye flight, for the original trip to Detroit. The Denver price was a total of \$75. I had some extra time in Denver, so I drove into the Rockies and up on Mt. Evans. Because some of the flights were on Spirit Air, I managed to pack for the four-day trip in just his backpack in order to save money. Only three left: SF, SEA, & Minneapolis.

Cutting Grass – I love cutting grass for some reason. Here's a picture of a good-looking yard. In both 2018 and 2019, I cut grass professionally in Emily's neighborhood. They are small yards and I figured rather than paying for a gym membership, I'd just let other people pay me to walk around their yard.



Emily & Daniel – Emily left Perry’s Steak House as hostess after Thanksgiving and started working as Operations Manager at Botanica, a house plant store. She really enjoys plants. Daniel is still working as a claims adjuster for Allstate Insurance. He sometimes travels and sometimes works from home. Since we live close to them, we are often able to eat dinner together, help each other with projects, or play cards or board games. They got a new car this year, a Jeep Compass, and the old 99 Ford Ranger came back home as an extra vehicle.



Andy & Siena – Andy is still the Process Manager at SKF in Charleston. He is well into his MBA online through Villanova. Here is a picture from the dock in their neighborhood in Mt. Pleasant, SC, where they bought a house this year. Over the summer, they came to Atlanta for a weekend, and we went to a Braves game together also with Andrew Parrish. The morning of the game we went to the Georgia Aquarium. Later in the year, we did a Braves playoff game which, didn’t go well.



Southern Baptist Convention Comes to Birmingham – The SBC met in Birmingham for the first time in many, many years. It kept me busy as Brook Hills was one of the area hosts for Crossover, an evangelistic effort held prior to the meeting each year when people attending the convention come early and engage in evangelism and mission project like medical clinics across the host city.



Rebuilding the Deck – In the fall, I rebuilt the deck with the help of Jack Roberts. It’s much stronger than the original, and we love the wire railing look so that we can see through to the yard with no barriers.



Rock the Block – Each year, instead of Vacation Bible School, Brook Hills hosts Rock the Block, a Bible club held in various neighborhoods across the city. We coordinate one that meets in Forest Lakes which is across the street from our subdivision.

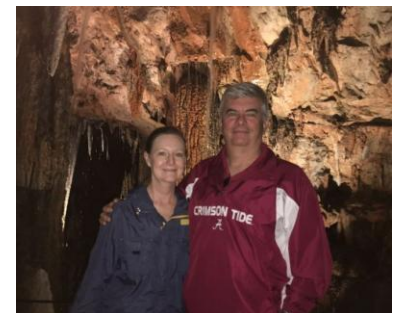


Memorial Day Float Trip on the Cahaba – Many of the folks in our Sunday night Small Group enjoy canoeing and kayaking, so we made another trip this year over to West Blockton to see the Cahaba Lillies in bloom. Pictured here is part of the group—Teri Lord, Liz, Anthony Martin, and Leonard Smith.



Brook Hills – I passed the five-year mark on staff, where I serve as the Adult & Small Groups Minister. It’s fun to gather with Discipleship Pastors from area churches for monthly meetings for fellowship, networking, and continuing education. The church started construction in 2019 on a two-story building project that includes space for adults and elementary age ministries as well as an expanded lobby, café area, and conference space. The project should be completed in Fall 2020.

Anniversary #34 – Liz and I went to DeSoto Caverns for an anniversary day. On the way, we discovered Lickin’ Good Donuts in Childersburg, later to find out many co-workers had already discovered and loved that place. At the Caverns, we also played putt putt and archery before enjoying an Italian lunch in town.



Spiritual Disciples & iPhone Apps – This year I enjoyed using some newly discovered iPhone apps. For years YouVersion has been a critical Bible reading app that makes it easy to compare different versions. The ones added this year were PrayerMate, an app to organize your prayer life, and Bible Memory, an app to help you memorize scripture. I reached my goal of memorizing 100 verses by the end of the year.

You Have Blessed Our Lives! - Sending Christmas cards & letters is one of our favorite Christmas traditions. You are among the friends who mean so much to us. Even though we might not get to spend time with you throughout the year, we value your friendship! We’d love to hear from you as well, so please stay in touch as we pray for one another through good times and bad!

May the joy of knowing Christ be yours this Christmas season!

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 1 John 4:9-10