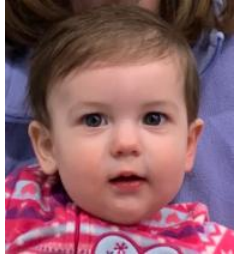




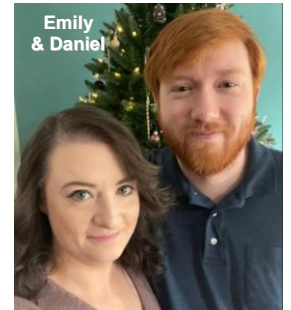
So Joy Christmas Letter

Greetings From Jay & Liz 2023

We hope you are well and enjoying the Christmas season. Christmas is a time when we think about family and friends, and we want you to know that you are a real blessing to us. Jay authored this edition with input from Liz.



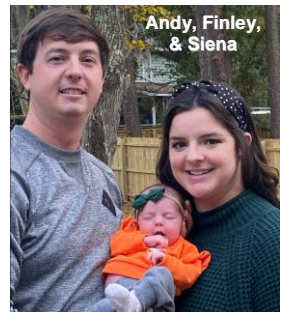
GRAND-PARENTING – Finley turned one on November 2. We’ve had so much joy spending time with her in Mount Pleasant (Charleston), South Carolina. We probably made five or six trips this year, and they came this way a couple of times. When we’re not together, it’s fun to FaceTime with Andy, Siena, and Finley. My favorite moment was a video Andy made when I found a way to make Finley laugh extremely long and loudly.



EMILY & DANIEL – Emily changed jobs this year and works for a company that provides tech support for companies not large enough to have their own IT staff. Daniel works as an adjuster for Liberty Mutual Insurance. Emily and Daniel still chase after three pups—Albie, Ellie, & Sage. It’s great that they also live here in Chelsea and sometimes join us for dinner and board games.



ANDY & SIENA – Andy still has an epoxy flooring business but also works full-time as Facilities Director for Palmetto Goodwill, which has 33 locations in the South Carolina “low country”. Siena works as an accountant and also in preschool at Seacoast Church, allowing her to place Finley in their daycare that is only for church employees. They have two pups-Baylor and Sheffield.



JOBS: BROOK HILLS, BUG JUICE, & MORE – Being a plant lover, Liz still works for Bug Juice Gardens, a plant nursery, and enjoys her time there. It’s supposedly part-time, but they often need a full week out of her. Her parents are doing well and live in Jacksonville, Alabama. Since 2014, I (Jay) have served as Adult and Small Groups Minister at The Church at Brook Hills.

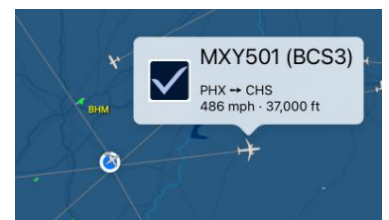
WE MISS TARA – Many of you got to know our dog, Tara. We got her from the pound probably 14 years ago. Her health continued to decline in many ways, and we lost her on my birthday in October.



BIG FAMILY TRIP: ARIZONA & UTAH – (See top left Grand Canyon picture.) We try to do a family trip the week of Mother’s Day with our kids and their spouses. It hasn’t always worked out but this year we did a trip out west with most of us. We flew to Phoenix, with the exception of Daniel, who stayed home to care for their dogs. Even Finley made the trip that involved lots of nature and hiking. We rented a 7-passenger van and visited Sedona, the Grand Canyon, Big Bend, Monument Valley, Arches National Park, and Antelope Canyon. One day, Emily wanted to see the sunrise over Sedona. So,

we got up at 4:30am, drove to a viewpoint, and enjoyed a beautiful sunrise along with some hot air balloons flying at the time. We discovered that AirBnB’s with three bedrooms are MUCH better than hotel rooms. We enjoyed a strenuous sunset hike up to Delicate Arch in Arches National Park and Emily got some great photos. The slot canyons in Arizona were a favorite as well.

THE FLY-OVER – I’ve enjoyed an app that tracks commercial planes in real time with altitude, speed, etc. Following our flight home from Phoenix, Andy’s family’s flight was delayed a lot. I was tracking their direct flight route from Phoenix to Charleston once we got home to Chelsea. The plane looked like it changed route over Texas due to a storm, giving them a flight path right over our house (the blue dot). Late that night, I took Liz outside, pointed to a blinking light moving thousands of feet overhead, and said, “There goes your grandbaby.”



OTHER COOL APPS - By the way, I really enjoy a prayer app, *Prayer Mate*, a Scripture memory app, *Bible Memory*, and a Bible reading app, *YouVersion*. I also found *Chirp* as a good and cheaper alternative to Audible. Check them all out!

SLOVENIA & GREEK ISLES CRUISE – My brother and his wife, Diane, invited us on a Greek Isles Cruise with them. We (Jay & Liz) found a way to use travel points to make it possible. The cheapest flights were midweek to Ljubljana, Slovenia. It's just a 2-3 hours from Venice, and we happen to have some friends in Slovenia serving as missionaries, Wade and Joan Killingsworth. We were able to visit them a few days, and they took us to Venice and served as tour guides for us. We all stayed in an AirBnB there. One day we went to Verona, Italy, and it was incredible as well. The cruise left from Ravenna, south of Venice. We visited Dubrovnik, Croatia, Athens, Greece, and the islands of Corfu and Mykonos. We loved seeing Athens and visiting Mars Hill where Paul preached (see Acts 17). Another sweet surprise was that Liz found Gioras Bakery on Mykonos that supposedly dates back to 1420 per their sign. Following the cruise, we caught a train to Venice and a bus back to Ljubljana, Slovenia for another couple of nights with Wade and Joan. We were able to help with their church's Kids' Club and also toured the old town there, which dates back to Roman Era. A castle sits on a hill overlooking the city. We will be back on a mission trip there at some point. The trip was a great opportunity to spend time with both Wade and Joan and Bruce and Diane.



The Parthenon Athens



Canal D'Amour Corfu, Greece

NEW SMALL GROUP – At church, we have led a group for quite a few years that started seeing a lot of growth during COVID. It grew much larger than a “small group”, so some people came out with us to start a new Sunday morning group. We also led a Sunday night group in our home, but with Liz working almost full-time, some transitions going on with members, and some people finding it a difficult time to meet, we transitioned some of those folks into our new Sunday morning group. It all seems to be working well and our Sundays aren't thirteen-hour days anymore.

COACHING BASEBALL – As you know, I love baseball. Last year, I completed my bucket-list item of seeing a major league game in all 30 cities. My six-year-old next-door neighbor, Nolan, has started playing city-league baseball. I often go over when I see him and his parents out playing or practicing. I was giving him some tips one day and his mom said, “You should coach Nolan's baseball team this fall. They are always looking for coaches.” It sounded like fun and our church is emphasizing getting involved in our neighborhoods and cities, so it seemed like a win-win situation. The team was named the IronBirds after a minor-league team of the same name. We came in second place in the end-of-the-season tournament.



Our neighbor, Nolan & “Coach Jay”

REAL LIFE - Despite all the fun adventures and stories above, life is real for us with tears, sickness, struggles, disappointments, and setbacks. But those things aren't fun to write about. I just wanted to keep it real for a minute.

WE MISS SEEING YOU! - Sending Christmas cards and letters is one of our favorite Christmas traditions and a way to stay connected with you at least once this year. Even though we might not get to spend time together, we value your friendship! We'd love to hear from you, so please let us know how life is going and how we can pray for you.

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

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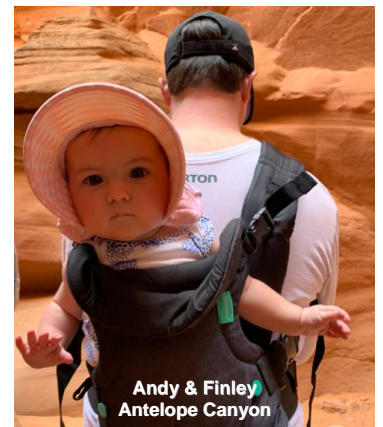
Antelope Canyon, AZ



Emily



Mykonos, Greece



Andy & Finley Antelope Canyon

The Outtakes...

IN SPORTS – Alabama just beat Auburn on a fourth down and 31 plan with less than a minute left. I’ve decided the new Bermuda Triangle runs between Montgomery, Alexander City, and Columbus, Georgia, making Jordan-Hare Stadium the epicenter of strange happenings. (Update: We made the playoffs! I hate it for Florida State with a perfect season and conference championship, but they are down to their third string quarterback.) My Atlanta Braves had a great year, winning over 100 games, but couldn’t survive a series against the Phillies following a bye-week. I was glad to see Texas win the World Series, with Evan Carter sporting the Texas-style “Jesus Won” T-shirt.



IN THE WORLD – We’re praying for the Israeli-Hamas conflict that started October 6, for the Russia-Ukraine conflict that has gone on for over a year, and for our country as an election is less than a year away. Sometimes, the news seems bleak, but God’s word shows us the end. The time between now and then may not be so fun.

GREAT GROUPS PODCAST – I’m still enjoying doing a podcast with one of my small group leaders. We’re looking forward to hitting 10,000 downloads in the next few weeks. When we started, we didn’t know if anyone would listen. Now, we have recorded 93 episodes. Visit GreatGroups.org to hear or see our work.

