

Hey happy holidays. We sincerely hope you and yours are having a beautiful holiday season bringing warmth, love, belongingness, and camaraderie. If yes, that's wonderful, maybe just read the bold text parts. If your holiday season is more complex, the italics might call to you, but these parts in italics may carry existential triggers. Grab a hot cocoa and a ginger cookie and let's look at what a year it's been.

For our family, it's been a year of adventures coast to coast. *An exceptionally exhausting year we've made through just this side of alive and on the poverty line. Don't get us wrong, we're grateful. Just can't give the usual highlights reel of years' past, something broke in us. We don't want to bring it down for people who aren't down, but we want to hang out in spirit with the people who are.* **There have been challenges and life lessons that have humbled us and made us feel more connected to humankind.** *There's that certain level of illness with a loved one or yourself that is at times triumphant, mostly though it just brings you to a new level of stinging realness that would be depression if you weren't so numb, that erases certain types of possible joy from your spectrum altogether, that you can't really fathom until you're in. Not complaining here, many have it worse, many have it as tough, we just want you to know we're with you if you're there.* **It's been a year of conversation and introspection, redefining what we want out of life and what our values are.** *And then it gets to be this time of year and everybody all over the place starts summing up the year and we're worn out from being introspective by the waves of challenges. And there are the jokes all over the place about Christmas music all the time and how horrible that is. And the suicides go up at this time of year as they do, and people laugh about the craziest ones like that guy that jumped over a railing at a mall because his girlfriend wanted more shoes. And this year brought the new twist of all the certain special kind of mega-Christian people with their self-started, false persecution "War on Christmas," with it's battle-cry "It's not Happy Holidays, it's Merry CHRISTMAS," that's so enmeshed with that kind of inherent embraced ignorance that paints the world as so cold an un-fixable that it really does feel like there is no God and we're all gonna die and those people - who are so convinced that there's a heaven that they will go to for not doing gay things and for celebrating Jesus's birthday on the made-up day it is over others who maybe don't but are still wonderful caring people - will never know there's not a heaven and maybe that's the worst part, they'll die feeling completely right after having made others suffer their whole lives and from that suffering they'll have derived comfort that acted as a cushion all the way up to that moment when in their head they'll be launched into the clouds and then outer space and then into Heaven all with their old righteous friends but really the lights are just about to be switched off. Not that we're atheists and believe in nothing after this life, we just think it's funny that the thing that makes it seem that way sometimes is the effect organized religion has had on our lives and minds. We can't afford to all be together for the holidays this year, and some of us couldn't get work off, but we're glad for the time we have together, whether during the holidays or beyond, and are glad that, for instance, we have homes even, during these times when so many people are losing theirs. Sorry maybe that last clause should have been in red. Does it ever make you wonder why we do any of this? Not*

just letters like this. How many people truly enjoy the holidays, versus how many go along with it for the sake of others, or just ride it out as off-the-radar as possible? It feels like we're supposed to pretend to be happy for the sake of peoples' frail hold on happiness, like a kid who discovered they'd been lied to about Santa for their entire lives, and then encouraged to lie to the other kids their age, in case they don't know yet, becoming a part of the ongoing legacy of lies. Is there any way out of this cycle, or do we just have to get more comfortable in bucking the trend or going along with it? **It makes us think about what's important: who do you want to spend this time of year with? And what do you want to spend it doing? Would you feel more enriched volunteering, but instead go along to the usual depressing family dinner out of a feeling of trapped obligation? Did you ever see the original Star Wars sequel, the Christmas special, where Han and pals are trying to help get Chewy home for LifeDay, his culture's equivalent of Christmas ("It's not Happy Holidays, Chewy, It's Merry CHRISTmas!"). I wish we could all just have a day like that, a life day. By life day, I interpret it as a day where we do the things most important to us in life. And I don't think it should be Christmas because if we need a culturally approved excuse to do what we really want in life and to spend it with who we want to, why are we sticking around in this Hunger Games we were thrown into by this baby we're celebrating slash his dad slash his invisible friend that some people demand that we celebrate? By the way, I was light about it before, but the people who make a big deal out of "It's Merry CHRISTmas" – fuck those people. Charmless lemmings. So that's what we try to make Christmas just another day of the year doing something worth doing with people we love doing stuff with, whatever that is. And every day like that, in January or August or anywhere in between, is a day worth celebrating in some small way. Speaking of observances that we follow out of dull routine, the only holiday I ever really feel like celebrating is Daylight Savings Time when we get that hour back and the receding darkness lifts some of that S.A.D. for so many of us**

Again, fuck those "Merry CHRISTmas" people, and **God Bless you and yours** (unless I guess you're one of those "Merry CHRISTmas" people) (but then again, even those people who do that aren't all bad, just misled sometimes and caring and well-intentioned otherwise, and life is confusing, I will give that to them, so I can't really do a blanket "Fuck those people" statement, for the ones who I know and otherwise respect I guess I should just say I wish you were actually as loving and righteous as you pretended to be, if you were we could probably solve a lot of the world's problems), **love for you all,**

**Brandon** (I can't really speak for the whole family on this one, but who can speak for their whole family, you know? And if one person can, do you think maybe there is a problem in that family? Or an incredible amount of frustration?)