



Michael and I with our kayak group in Chicago's "Little Hawaii" harbor last September.

Compliments of the season to you and yours!

The holidays are the time of year where I'm finally able to surface for air and reflect on the ground our family diaspora has covered these past 12 months. Quite often, the way we walked was thorny, through no fault of our own. Other times, we sailed through the year with the wind at our backs.

But as the rain enters the soil, the river enters the sea, so tears run to a predestined end. I always was a fan of classic Universal Studios horror movies.

Our oldest daughter, Sammi and her new husband, Jeremy, moved to Dallas in the spring for job opportunities. Jeremy had been in a funk since he lost his job at the paper mill last December and wanted to move to a state where his Six Sigma Black Belt certification carried more value in the job market.

So it surprised us to no end when he decided to pursue a career as a rodeo clown, once they rodeo clowns can earn up to six figures. Of course, there are occupational hazards with the job such as distracting angry bulls and bucking broncos from fallen cowboys, and having to explain to people at Targets across the heartland why he buys eyeliner. And rodeo clowns also attract their own dedicated coterie of buckle bunnies — that's rodeo speak for groupies. Sammi found

some texts from an unfamiliar number on Jeremy's iMessage account one night that has her concerned. But Jeremy says being a rodeo clown is a calling and he has to give it a shot or else he won't be able to live with himself. And he still has the Six Sigma Black Belt as a fallback option.

I could always choke some sense into him with the belt, as well.

It did not go unnoticed that Jeremy's dream of being a rodeo clown dovetailed with the news that Sammi was pregnant with triplets. They were born in October, healthy and with the pronounced cone-shaped heads and crossed eyes all newborns that pass through a birth canal are blessed with temporarily.



Michael and my father-in-law at Sammi's gender reveal party, wondering how she was going to push three kids through her birth canal.

But Sammi isn't speaking to us or her in-laws after the gender reveal party incident. She was insistent on having an enormous gender reveal at her baby shower, but with all those mishaps from other gender reveal parties in the news, we thought the shower should have been

low-key. We never made a big deal out of knowing our kids' genders. We just wanted healthy babies. We didn't feel a need to make a pink pipe bomb to let the family know when Sammi was being born?

Anyway, we cut straws and I drew short, so I had to put together the party. We decorated the backyard with enough clues to keep guests guessing until it was time for the reveal. When it was time for the announcement, however, I broke out a garden hose and soaked the assembled guests in water. Because gender is fluid. Get it?

Sammi was livid, but Jeremy said he wanted to incorporate a spray hose into his clown routine.

I'm sure Sammi will come around, especially when one of the babies' heads is slow to round out and she becomes stressed by the daunting task of raising triplets. She landed a marketing job with a construction firm before she found out she was pregnant and they were real good with her maternity leave. They extended the usual 12 weeks to 20 — four weeks for each extra baby — but she thinks she'll be back at work in a month. Take the time off!

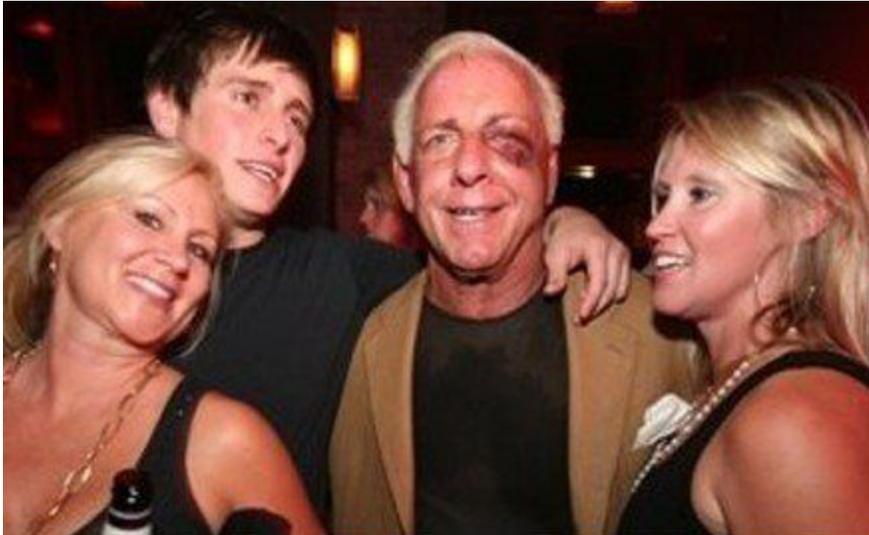
Our youngest daughter, Amanda, graduated from UW Whitewater last summer with a degree in animal husbandry. She had her pick of a variety of dairy jobs coming out of school, but she blindsided us by deciding to breed hairless cats. Amanda grew up with a cat hair allergy and always wanted one as a pet, but there was no way in Hell we were going to let one of those bald monstrosities in the house. It's bad enough having a domesticated predator in the house, dropping bowel movements in boxes of gravel. I draw the line at wrinkled mini-lions.

So Amanda spent a fortune on what she thought were two hairless cats, and she had them for weeks before realizing that what she bought were actually opossum. She suspected something wasn't right when a couple "kittens" from her first litter chewed their way through a Tupperware top to get to her steel cut oats. This was a young woman who graduated summa cum laude! I thought that was Latin for "really smart."

That brings us to Adam, the middle child. Michael, my ever-patient husband, told him that a journalism degree might not be the best way to spend the tuition money we were paying out six years ago. But Adam coupled it with a marketing degree and has been employed by an energy drink brand in the Pacific Northwest for the past three years. He goes to bars and nightclubs four times a week and buys rounds of cocktails using the drink as a mixer, in what he says is "viral marketing." When that drink brand had to be recalled due to an e coli outbreak a couple months back, we had no idea Adam was being literal.

Recently, Adam has been questioning his next steps. He received a promotion at work, so now he doesn't come home from work at 4 a.m. reeking of cigarettes and despair. He channeled that restlessness into political activism and volunteered for Andrew Yang's campaign. It isn't the choice we would have made; I like Liz Warren and Michael is an "anyone but Trump" guy. And since Adam joined the campaign, talking with him has become impossible. Every time we ask why we should consider Andrew Yang, he tells us to "Google him."

I did and found that Yang's biggest policy issue is establishing a "universal basic income," which Adam will need if the Yang campaign doesn't make him a paid staffer soon. Yang is also concerned about automation, which doesn't seem to bother Adam every time he orders something from Amazon.



The kids with Ric Flair, who's sporting a shiner courtesy of Michael after asking if I wanted to ride Space Mountain.

As for Michael and me, we're deciding what to do with the settlements he received from Black & Decker and the county stemming from the accident he had at work. You remember I wrote that he lost three fingers to a faulty circular saw?

(I'll never forgive myself for thinking the blood splatter-themed letters were a good idea.)

Anyway, the settlements add up to mid-six figures but we're split on whether to spend the money, or invest it. I want to set up an annuity and pay the proceeds into our retirement accounts, so that we have a bit of a cushion in case our home value never returns to pre-recession levels.

Michael, on the other hand, wants to spend it like a sailor on shore leave. He put down payments on a speed boat and a Jeep without telling me, and we're still fighting to get the deposit on the boat returned. And he's been leaving brochures around the house for some place called "Latitude Margaritaville." Did you know Jimmy Buffet has retirement communities now? Is there anything he cannot sully with his tacky tastes?

And those tastes are pricey. Godfrey Daniel! We've been prudent fiscally, but there is no way I'm paying a half-million bucks for a home in Florida, only to be surrounded by a bunch of other seniors singing "A Pirate Looks at Forty" off-key.

The kids are also looking for a piece of Michael's finger money. We might help Sammi on account of her fertility and all, but the other two have to live with their decisions. We Gen Xers are inherently nihilists. We'll let them drown in their debt and bad decisions and not blink an eye. But we love them

I'll end the letter here. The Sonos speaker in my kitchen is asking me what I want to hear and that is a choice I'm not sure I can make without a half a bottle of Beaujolais Nouveau, a tin of Vienna sausage and some saltines. My stomach is not upset, but it should be if that's tonight's dinner LOL!

Whether you celebrate Christmas, Hanukkah, Diwali or if you're a goddamn pagan, Happy Holidays from us!

Your memory cannot keep us warm, but it never leaves us cold,

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Gert