

Hello Everybody,

OK, here we go...the annual X-mas letter! The older I get, the past just kind of blurs together so what I've come to do is start a list on my phone of notable events throughout the year that I can come back to when it's time to start doing my year-end recap. Well, it seems this year was relatively unremarkable so I had to start scrolling through my photos to jog my memory for anything interesting. What I've come up with is my usual series of vignettes format. BUT, I feel like people probably think I'm making this stuff up...even more so since we don't see "Our Friends..." often enough for you to call us out. Of course I embellish the stories at least a little bit...but that's just good story-telling! Anywho, from scrolling through my photos, I came up with the idea that I would do somewhat of a photo-log this year as a more tactile experience. This is the one time of year this nerd gets to really flex his creative muscle outside of Excel spreadsheets (...like my Random Meal Generator spreadsheet), so enjoy.

We found out we smell...

Oh boy! Do you ever notice that some people's houses have kind of a smell? I'm not talking like obvious uncleaned litter box or wet dog stank. Rather, sometimes it's like a hint of stale patchouli, sour milk, moth balls or something else random, like band-aids. Sometimes, when you go on a long vacation and get back home, you'll get a whiff of your own smell when you first walk into your house which makes you ponder, "Hmmm...so that's what we smell like". In most cases it's so faint that no one ever notices OR no one ever says anything, which is even worse. Well, this year I've been traveling for work a lot more and I've kind of noticed "the funk", so I asked my parents point blank..."Do we smell?". Most Minnesotans will never tell you the honest truth, but Ma and Pa always will. So, the verdict...Yes, we have a smell to us..."*it's not necessarily bad, but we can smell it on you...we were going to say something, but...y'know, well...I think it's when you started using those things to wash your clothes*" (Note: we use some sort of crystals which can be recharged in the sun...this is what happens when your significant other is a n organic hippy artist...chose your battles, my friends). So, we washed all of our clothes with Oxi-clean and vinegar, used baking soda to vacuum the carpets and bought a bunch of carbon odor removers to place around the house, and doubled-down and bought more laundry crystals. I'm fairly certain we still smell though (or should I say, have a "scent" to us), but you can be the judge.

Sweepstakes

Have you heard about the Japanese TV show where they lock a man in a room and he has to survive on sweepstakes winnings? I think I got that right, but I'm too lazy to look it up. Anyway, it has been a very fortuitous year for me with sweepstakes. Anyone who knows me knows that I'm too stingy to gamble and I'm fairly risk-averse when it comes to money. I think that's why I love sweepstakes so much...It doesn't cost anything (well, aside from your time to fill out the forms or the occasional postage stamp for AMOE [alternate means of entry]) and I think that enhances the buzz when I do win something. How I really got into sweepstakes was from reading the official rules. So interesting...this is where I figured out there is ALWAYS a way to enter for free; otherwise, it would be considered a lottery and that becomes complex for business to deal with when they really just want market crap to you and get your information. But, the official rules is also where you can get all the details to set your strategy. Is it a one-time entry only, a once-per-day, #socialmediaentry, mail-in, etc. I got my Dad into it too...he REALLY likes reading the official rules. So, what have I racked up so far this year?

- Solo Pi Outdoor Pizza Oven + 2x Beach Chairs (Smirnoff)
- \$ 20 Fanatics Gift Card
- Miller High Life deck of cards
- \$ 500 Kwik Trip Gift Card (Winston)
- Stein (Sam Adams)
- 1x Free Game of Bowling (Pepsi)
- \$ 5 Gift Card (Coca Cola)
- 4x Timberwolves tickets and "Player for a Day" Experience + Team Merchandise
- Thermos (A&W)

Not a bad haul, huh? The irony is that a lot are from brands that I don't even buy. Winston cigarettes, year right, c'mon, I don't even smoke...but, thank you. Don't believe me, I've got a giant ugly stein as a centerpiece on the dinner table to prove it.

Shrooms

For my partner Abby's birthday, I signed us up for a mushroom foraging class. It was recommended by a friend and we like to go hiking so I thought it might spice up our recreational life. The guy teaching the class had a PhD in mycology and also worked with the state poison control hotline. During the class he gave an overview of the types of mushrooms, walked us through the forest to show us how and where to hunt for mushrooms, and showed us some other cool techniques for identifying certain kinds of mushrooms (did you know that you can cut some mushrooms and they will turn blue in color before your eyes?!?). We even found some that smelled like orange juice. At first he seemed to have encyclopedic knowledge mushrooms. But, when asked what the orange juice smelling ones were, he was like "*dunno, but there are sure a lot of them out here.*" That's when we also learned that there are a lot of unclassified mushrooms, there are a lot of compounds in mushrooms that have not been evaluated by science and even edible ones may not agree with your stomach, there are several types of look-alike varieties that are deadly but look similar to popular edible ones (e.g. Jack-O Lantern mushrooms [which glow in the dark] are toxic and look similar to yellow oyster mushrooms), AND a lot of the field guide books sold on Amazon are written by AI and not at all accurate. So, while we had a good time we also determined that we're not going to take up mushroom foraging as a hobby; at least not to eat them anyway. Maybe we'll take up archery next year...

Suicidal Mice

For some reason, this year mice have started performing ritualistic suicide by decapitation at the hands of my A/C fan blade. It happened once last year and I chalked it up as pretty bad luck for that poor mouse. But then it started becoming a regular thing this year...I'd be sitting in my La-Z-Boy recliner reading the newspaper in the evening and (in my best onomatopoeia), I'd hear the thermostat relay kick on, the A/C fan whir up to speed then....schlinkt, chlop...ti-ti-ti-ti-ti.....ch.....ch.....ch.....ch... Uggghhh, c'mon! Not again!!! I'm for libertarian rights, but these guys leave a giant mess on their way out the door that I've got to clean up before the sun hits it the next day. So, I put some wire mesh over the top of the A/C unit (since I only find them heedlessly dangling from the top), meticulously tying it down with zip ties so that they couldn't get in any gaps. Lo and behold, they keep getting through. I don't know what it is about MY A/C unit. It doesn't seem to be an issue with the neighbors. Are they hypnotized?!? Anyway, I think I've got it solved for now...I've built a type of wooden frame to fit around the edges of

the fan and tied that down so that there aren't any gaps in the mesh that the mice can get under. I also put a ton of mousetraps on and around the A/C unit. Fingers crossed....

Subway Surprise

Abby took an artist journey around-the -US on the Amtrak starting in St. Paul (> Portland > San Francisco > LA > Phoenix > New Orleans > Philadelphia > Chicago) and I flew out to Chicago around Easter to meet her so that we could have a date in the city and take the final leg of the train journey to loop back home to the Twin Cities together. The one thing that we love to do in Chicago is to visit the MCA Museum of Contemporary Art and maybe the dispensary beforehand. As we are making our way across town via the subway, we've had a transfer in the loop and I was getting stupidly excited during the long wait for the train to arrive. As the train rolls into the platform, I look around and Abby is nowhere to be found...she must have wandered off ??? *Well, no time to panic...we know where we're going... Jump on and meet her on the other side.* *Phone rings* It's Abby and she informs me that I got on the train going the wrong direction...oops! So, I'll get off at the next stop and go back around. As the next train comes rolling in and the doors open, I'm standing in the middle of the platform watching the crowd part towards the train...and in the middle of the naked cement floor, there lies...an Easter egg. So weird. No lying.

Well, that about wraps it up. A pretty uninteresting year as a whole, but some fun nuggets to think back on. I look forward to reading your letters as they start rolling in soon and have a nice and relaxing holiday season!

Best regards,
Tony

