



## Christmas Letter 2014

2014, where do I start? If I were organized and a little OCD like Pat, I would naturally start with New Year's Day but what is the fun in that? I do have a list here on one of those yellow legal pads. Sure enough it is headed with 2014 and below that is Jan. in big letters and underlined. Who would have made such a list to help me chronicle the year? If you guessed Akira, I'll give you one more try. You are right. I call it Pat's List for lack of a better name. Perhaps the easiest way to compose this normally verbose narrative would be to simply copy Pat's List.

## 2014

### Jan.

Josh indoor soccer \  
Saturday morning \

14 – D's haircut  
17 – Pat's haircut

### Apparently, January was a slow news month!

OK, apparently, this is not the best course to follow. Or is that coarse? It was a rocky start so perhaps coarse would work. I think we can say that January was basically uneventful.

As I look over Pat's List, February was not a whole lot more exciting, unless you include the itinerary of the cancelled vacation as Pat did in her list. We were to be gone the entire month, basking in the Florida sun. Unfortunately, the snow god had other ideas and buried us in some of the global warming side effect snow. I don't profess to know the gender of this somewhat fickle deity, but she does seem to be a bit erratic and undecided. Is she blaming us for raping our world's environment or is she just upset that the Giant glaciers are melting faster than she can replace them and it just makes the globe look shabby with the receding ice line. Whatever the reason, we were stuck in the snow and making the trip south seemed more burdensome than either of us wanted. In hindsight, we should have gone because we would have been trapped on the icy road mayhem down in Atlanta. We could have paid for 6 months in Florida from what we could have made renting out heated space in our camper; and at \$5 a flush, we could have made out like big bank CEO's during the bail out.

March started with a couple doctor's appointments for me and should have been seen as a precursor of health issues waiting in the background for both of us. By April, Pat was finally feeling better after last year's second knee replacement. Let's see, in the last couple years, she has had two new knees replaced and a shoulder rebuild. She has been in the shop more than our old '94 Jeep. Considering her mileage, that is probably to be expected. She has a lot of hard miles on her. "She's been rode hard and put away wet." Probably should trade her in for something younger. WHAT? NO! I'm talking about the Jeep.

Spring was delightful with all the snow replaced by warmer than normal weather. We were re-landscaping the back yard to try to salvage some of the garden ravaged by Akira during the winter freeze where anything foolish enough to show itself above ground, was eaten by Akira. She would ingest stuff even a Billy Goat would leave behind. During this renovation, Pat was working like a young ranch hand. She had the physical drive back even laughing off a tumble on the rocks. Once we worked through April, May hit with a vengeance! May 2<sup>nd</sup>, she entertained some grade school friends and she was having some pain walking then. It got worse with time and she scheduled a visit to the doctor. By the 16<sup>th</sup>, she was in so much pain, she could not wait for the scheduled appointment and I took her into the Ortho

Walk-in clinic. She was using a walker by then and was barely able to get in and out of the car. They took x-rays of her hip and leg and the doctor and I looked at them as we sat in the office. There was an area on her hip where the image looked moth-eaten. The doctor said he didn't know what that was. He gave Pat a cortisone shot and set her up for Physical Therapy. The shot didn't help at all. By the weekend, she could not make it up stairs and we had tried to make her comfortable on the lower level family room. Monday's trip to PT was very painful even with pain medication. The therapist, who was a personal friend by this time after the 2 knees and shoulder recuperation, came in and looked at the report from the doctor. She went from jovial to somber as she read the report. She looked at me and asked if I had seen the report, then she left the room in tears. I had not seen the report and we had not had contact with the doctor after the visit. I looked at the report and it felt like someone had kicked me in the groin. I read it again and again in disbelief, trying to be sure it said what I thought it said and it did. While "CANCER" was not mentioned, the more benign words like carcinoma, stage 4 and metastatic almost glowed as I read the report through the tears. Comments like hip degeneration and possible hip fracture and failure were now entering my thought process. Pat had cancer in a fractured hip and it could fail at any time, **and the doctor sent her to PT?** By this time the therapist was back in the room and her sadness and concern was now laced with anger. Why was the MRI not scheduled yet? Why was she here at PT? Why had the doctor not called after the x-ray was read by a competent radiologist? All we had were questions and we wanted answers. Fast forward through a lot of pain, frustration and anger as Pat confronted the doctors and the insurance company. By the end of the week, the MRI was authorized while Pat held them on the line for the confirmation number. When she called the doctor's office with the authorization number, they said it was the first time the patient had the authorization BEFORE the doctor. The doctors and insurance company didn't know what they were up against when they took on Pat. She could make a Pit Bull squeal and run.

She got the MRI on Thursday the 22<sup>nd</sup> and was called into the surgeon's office after it was completed. They admitted her to the hospital the next day for more tests and eventual surgery on Sunday. She got a rod in her thigh bone and a screw from the rod into the ball of her hip. Radiation followed. The good news is that the cancer was from her breast cancer 10 years ago that had migrated to her hip. This is the easiest cancer to control and **we expect Pat to beat it again.** Pat finished her radiation treatments June 25<sup>th</sup> and started the road to recovery.

The same day Pat was released from her treatment, our son-in-law's mother was released from her suffering. "Hee Jung Oh (Ahn), 61, of Springfield, passed away peacefully in her sleep on Wednesday, June 25, 2014 at Memorial Medical Center in the company of her loved ones." While we know she is in a better place, free from the monster we call cancer, it has been very hard for the family; especially during the holidays.

If I had to put a label on 2014, it would be the year of many hard times. We had cancelled the winter trip; then, faced cancer on two fronts and then were forced to cancel more trips. We had to cancel our trip to St. Croix SP in Minnesota planned to coincide with our nephew's wedding there June 8<sup>th</sup>. We also cancelled our trip to Cades Cove in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park scheduled for the first part of July. That made the trifecta of cancelled vacations. It has been a long and hard road this year.

True to the natural flow of time, July was followed by August and now Pat was feeling better. She now gets several scans every 3 months which will go on for a year; then continue less often. She takes a hormonal therapy cancer treating drug every day and gets a shot every month to strengthen the bones. Side effects from the hormonal drug are minimal besides the full beard and chest hair but thanks to the many prayers and Pat's determination, recent scans are showing no cancer activity.

With the number of doctor's appointments dwindling, we decided August would be a good time to open our house as a bed and breakfast for friends during the school reunion time of the year. One of Pat's cousins Patty Giordano Benton, spent a month, no wait, it wasn't quite that long, while she was attending her 50<sup>th</sup> reunion at Lanphier HS. When the news of Big D's B & B spread, we had a steady flow of customers through September. Jackie and Steve Hubbins spent several weeks while here for our 50<sup>th</sup> reunion and as soon as we got the linens changed and the menu updated, an old camping friend from Hot Springs Arkansas, stopped on his return from his reunion. As soon as he left, we took down the sign and Big D's B & B was just a fond memory.

Our reunion was truly the highlight of the year. Not only because we were making money from the B & B but because we were able to put names to the old people we didn't recognize on FaceBook. A sad point to note was the passing of a classmate and good friend, Doug Shuster a couple days after the reunion. A fund drive for flowers, took up a life of its own and by the time I had collected all the donations, we had over \$6,000 which we donated to Springfield High School fund drives with over \$5,000 going toward the new athletic field. It was a rewarding endeavor but by the end, I was eager to file those notes away until next year when we have a new drive to help the SHS Booster Club with a yearly donation. This year, we will be helping support the play and musical. I am very proud of my class for stepping up like this.

With all the health issues hopefully behind us, and the class projects closed up for the year, we finally were able to hitch up the ol' camper and see some fall colors. The first trip was up into Door County Wisconsin. We went to see the colors but also to spend some quality time with a fellow class of '64 "Solon". Nancy and Hans Feld put the sparkle in our trip like the angel on top of the Christmas tree.



We had one good weather day with partial sun followed by rain, mist, clouds, fog and more rain. It wasn't until we were heading home a day early that we saw some blue in the sky as seen in the picture at left. The week we stayed up there was not nearly long enough and we would have liked to stay longer, but we also had reservations for Cades Cove in GSMNP the end of the month.

After a short time home to replenish staples in the camper and wash our clothes, we headed south for a couple nights at Giant City SP in southern Illinois.

From there, we continued south in search of **the colors of fall**; and **colors we found!** Sorry Nancy, but they were spectacular! And they had sun! We had reservations for 5 nights lasting through the end of October. The colors were beautiful and the weather could not have been better. Daytime temperatures were in the 60's and we were in God's color studio. The leaves on the upper elevations were just past peak with some foliage already gone but, colors at the lower levels were just prime. It simply does not get any better than that. Our reservations took us to the end of the reservable window.



November 1<sup>st</sup>, it would be first- come-first-served reservation at the park. Because we occupied a site we could simply extend the time for another week. That was my plan. We all know about those best-made plans.

We spent the last day of October mostly at the campsite. It had been a rainy day which we were enjoying in the camper; I was working on my photographs on my laptop. There was no let up to the rain and the temperatures were dropping. There were still quite a few campers but not like the day before. We did hear some leaving even after dark but the rain covered much of the noise. Pat had already gone to bed and I noticed the silence. The rain had stopped. I thought this would be a good time to take Akira out for one last short walk around the campsite. I hooked on her leash and tried to open the door. It was hard to open but we headed down the steps. I first noticed how light it was. Normally, it was pitch black. Then it hit me, before my foot hit the first step, I realized it was snowing. The door was hard to open because the weight of the snow was causing the awning to bow down against the top of the door. That's when I noticed most of the campers had left. Akira quickly did her business and I put her back inside so I could roll in the awning. It is electric and not all that powerful so it was not moving much. I had to be careful not to use too much battery power or we would not have heat during the night! I got out the broom and started pushing up from the bottom to shake the snow off the canvas. Not much luck there. The heavy wet snow was sticking to the awning. For the next half hour, I was cycling through rolling and poking and sweeping; as I eased the awning in. I was rolling in leaves, snow and probably a few squirrels that had fallen from the tree but it was finally in and safe from collapse. I was cold, wet, and also ready to collapse so I went in and settled in for the night. Through the night, I could hear snowballs dropping onto the camper roof from the overhanging trees. Some sounded like small woodland creatures. I was awakened several times during the night by the sounds of a bear or two using the camper as a trampoline.

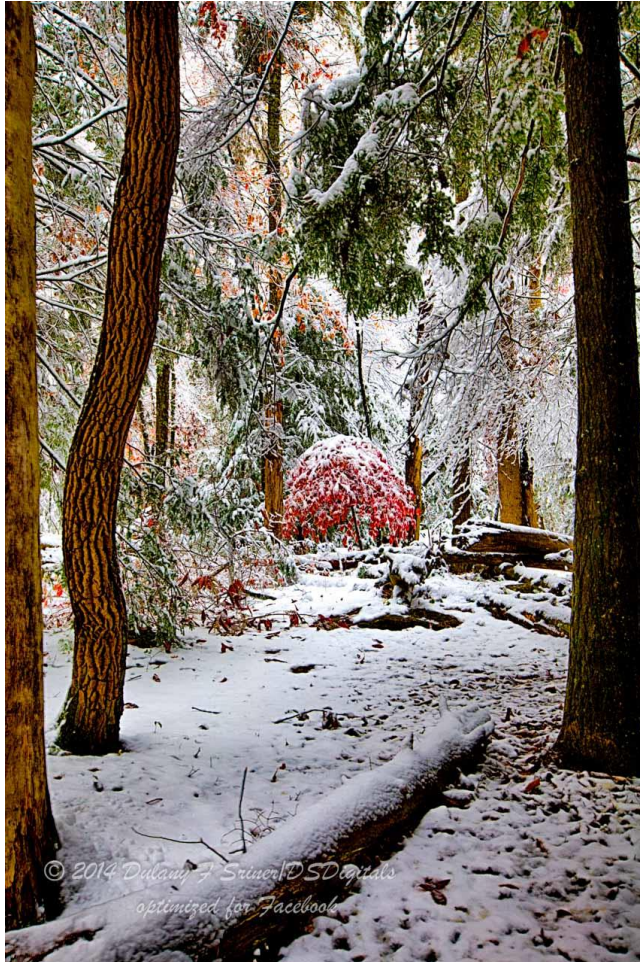


Sunup came none too early and Akira and I ventured out into the stillness. It was still early and there was little movement. The silence was only broken by the sound of breaking limbs. The 5 inches of wet snow on the picnic table was indicative of what was on the trees still in full foliage. A beautiful crimson maple was leaning precariously over our camper. I figured it would not fall over from the root ball but might break about half way up. If it hinged at the break, it would fold and come down near the tree base. If it broke free, it could

easily come through the camper roof. Akira and I walked in the semi-darkness to check out the situation. It was evident early on that driving would be difficult due to fallen trees and our road to the exit was blocked by a large tree across the road. Around the bend, I saw other blocked roadways. Fellow campers were getting up to also access the damage. There were even a couple tents near-by. Their inhabitants were in a daze as to what to do. Times like this bring out the pioneering spirit. The McGiver in me enjoys the challenge. Once I had assessed the conditions and determined we were relatively safe, the artist in me started seeing the beauty and potential for phenomenal pictures. With my camera in one hand and Akira's leash in the other, we were off to explore. With the sun providing



more light, the contrast between the wet black tree limbs and the bright white snow transformed the landscape into a winter wonderland. The bright red and yellow leaves shone like beacons in the ever-increasing light. The warm ground was melting the snow as fast as it came down but the trees and raised vegetation insulated the snow from the ground and it piled up like bright white cotton candy. All I could do was stand there and try to absorb the energy. The snow brought a calming quiet. If I had



dropped dead right there, I'm sure it would be only a few steps from heaven. It is hard to describe the feeling. A cracking sound close by brought me back to reality. I had to put all those other feelings away and get back to the current needs.

The first thing to do was start up the generator. I didn't want the battery power to run out resulting in no furnace. After getting everything charged, we all climbed into the truck to check out the rest of the campground. There were quite a few tents in the other section and many of them were packing up. I learned later that the rangers were escorting them down off the mountain behind a large end loader to clear downed trees as they went. Many of the roads in the campground were still blocked but another end loader was clearing them away. We made our way around the obstacles and arrived back at the camper and the other hardy campers. A ranger came by and said they were taking the small units like pop-ups and tents out of the park. The larger units like ours were here to stay for a while.

I figured I would simply make the best of it and headed out with my camera to see what I could capture. While I was gone, the ranger came back and told Pat they were taking out a group of campers at 3:30. If we wanted to get out, we had to be at the ranger station. Pat tried to pack up what she could but so much she could not do. She was frantic when I got back. I tried to calm her down. I knew she wanted to get away and I also knew we could not be ready in time; so I went to the ranger station to see what other options we had. He hesitated but said I could get out with the maintenance crew at 5:00. That's what we did. I would have preferred to stay another week because after a couple cold nights, it would be back above freezing and clear skies were expected. With all that she had been through this year already, I knew we had to go. We headed down the road out of the mountains. I knew this was possibly a once in a lifetime opportunity but it would not be mine this time. We had considered going south from there and follow the colors south but sometimes you just have to reel it in and head for home. Pat was under enough stress.

The end of November was again filled with doctor's appointments. I had a MRI of my knee that indicated a torn meniscus that could be repaired with orthoscopic surgery. Pat's set of scans did not show any cancer activity but a subsequent appointment with the surgeon indicated problems with her hip recovery. Healing, slowed by the radiation was still not showing much improvement. The screw he

had put in to stabilize the top ball on the femur (hip joint) was not stable and he told us hip failure was inevitable. We scheduled another consultation to determine the best procedure to fix it. Hopefully a new hip will not be needed. She has so much scrap metal in her now, when it comes time for her to leave this plane, the family won't know if they should bury her or sell her for scrap. I wonder if those parts would be part of the organ donor program.

UPDATE: Today, we had our consult with another ortho doctor who specialized in the hip fractures. The news was good. Although the original operation was not ideal, he thought he could correct the problem. The original rod in the leg was too long so it did not allow the proper angle where the screw went up into the ball. He asked about pain and Pat indicated there was none or it was minimal. He looked puzzled. If the hip were failing as first thought, there would be considerable pain. His thought was that the bone was healing and perhaps the best path would be to wait to determine if there was further deterioration or if the healed bone was holding its own at this point. We will go back the first of the year to look for change. The fact that there has been some apparent collapse of the hip, has made that leg shorter which might require further attention but at this time we feel we should get it healed and stable before going back in if that becomes necessary.

I always try to end my annual novelette with a little of my philosophy, usually hidden away in some humor. I have addressed everything from narrower toilet paper to Governor Rod's attempt to sell Lincoln's tomb. While this has not been a very funny year, it certainly has had its lessons. While we walk this trail we call life, it is important not to give too much emphasis to the destination. Life is about the journey. The destination is nothing but a stopping point. It is simply a place to stop to catch one's breath before heading down the next path of opportunity. Life is to be experienced not simply observed. In the end, all is as it should be and whatever deity you choose to follow, will guide you if you listen.

As Pat and I walked from the doctor's office today, we discussed what we were feeling. There was a great relief that the immediate surgery was not advised. Then we thought about what was discussed. The original surgery was not done right and every indication was that it should fail but it was healing. What was the difference? We agreed it was divine intervention. Praise the Lord; and thank you to all who have walked with us on this journey and have lightened the load with your prayers. Bless you all and may your load also be lightened as you walk through life's challenges.

Love and Light,  
Love and Peace,  
Love and Blessings,  
throughout this holiday season and the coming new year.

Pat and Dulany

NOTE: You will notice there are not many pictures in this publication. As the technology changes, so must the way we use it. This sharing is now delivered primarily electronically and ALL my pictures are available on line. (see links below) If we don't have your email, please share it with us. If you are on FaceBook please "friend" us. I share photographs and a bit of my philosophy regularly on my FB page.

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