



*Happy Holidays*

Dear Family and Friends,

This past year began with our final tour of duty as Legislative Aides in Juneau (more on that later). It was a successful legislative session and we are proud of the work accomplished by our Senators. In May we traveled to Colorado for Anna's dad Steve's wedding to the lovely Wanda Phillips. It was a beautiful ceremony in Greeley and many members of the Sorensen and Shoemaker family were in attendance. As part of the same swing Outside, we did a weeklong road trip of the Pacific Northwest. We visited family and explored the Oregon Coast, Columbia River Gorge and Northern Idaho.

Our summer was dedicated to settling into the cabin (did we mention it's finished?!?) and tending our garden. Joe's parents Jim and Pam, 11 year-old niece Elisa and nine year-old nephew Wilkin spent an Alaska summer living in our yurt, building a cabin, and exploring the area. It was great having them here and it was fun seeing the kids enjoy a summer in the Midnight Sun. Joe's brother Jay and sister Jamie also visited between Summer Solstice and the 4th of July. Later in July, Joe's grandpa Don Hardenbrook and his then-fiance (now wife!) Jo Honey visited.

Throughout the summer and fall, Anna took several trips out to the Sorensen ranch in Delta to visit Steve and Wanda. While there, she had a lot of fun helping out with construction of a high tunnel for Wanda's garden and hauling trees out of the fire-break with the new tractor and grapple.

In November, both of the Senators we work for were up for re-election. Joe took leave from his job to manage his boss's campaign and Anna was a super volunteer! In politics, you have good years and bad years. For us, this was a bad year. Redistricting made our races very difficult, and we weren't able to pull it off in our new districts.

We will look back at our time in the legislature fondly. We worked with some great people and we learned a lot about our state, our government and ourselves. That said, we are excited about what the future holds and eager to enjoy a less stressful way of life.

We closed out this year by heading north to visit our musher friend Brent Sass who has a homestead in Eureka, Alaska (Population: Brent). For the third year in a row, we prepared and packaged the food he will eat during the Yukon Quest and Iditarod dog sled races. Brent is rising fast through the ranks of the mushing world, and was named Rookie of the Year in the 2012 Iditarod.

So what is next for us? We are hitting the road! From early January through the end of March we will be exploring a swath of the U.S. as we pilot a friend's recently purchased camper from Tucson to Fairbanks. We are planning to visit friends and family, cook some good food and enjoy ourselves. Our current plan is to swing through southern Arizona, New Mexico and Texas before heading north through Arkansas to Kansas City, Missouri in January. In February, we'll stay with Joe's brother Jay and explore Kansas City. Also in February, we are planning to fly to D.C. to visit friends and then head to Roanoke to visit Joe's sister and her family. We'll ride the rails back to Kansas City. In March, we make our way to Colorado, Idaho, Oregon, Washington and British Columbia, before leaving the RV in Seattle with friends for a couple months.

In late March, we will fly home to Fairbanks where we will get our garden preparations underway and finish up some projects around the house. In May, we'll fly back to Seattle to get the camper and hit the Alcan for the drive north.

We are really excited about this trip and for the opportunity it will give us to enjoy ourselves, explore some new areas and think long and hard about what we want to do next.

Life is good! We will be sending out updates from the road. Keep in touch!

Much love, Anna and Joe

(Photo credit goes to our buddy Matt Moser, taken at the wedding of our amazing friends Kate Herring and Tory Dugan at Thompson Pass near Valdez, AK)