

December 2015

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair... *Charles Dickens, A Tale of Two Cities*



The year started off full of hope, yet Kevin and I were way too busy traveling the globe to even notice. He was in Stockholm March and April, while I was in Boulder, CO, Raleigh/Durham, NC, and then a month on the west coast, seven venues ending in Vancouver. We had to board the two dogs for nearly a month.

We both came skidding in within days of each other, and then headed up to Massachusetts to watch Brianna graduate from UMass Amherst. It

was a glorious day, especially when we heard that Neil DeGrasse Tyson was to be the keynote speaker at Commencement. Worth the money we spent for her education to hear him speak.

One week later, Eric returned from his ten month deployment in Qatar via Texas where he was debriefed and readied for his return to civilian life.

Four days later I celebrated my 60th birthday! We threw together a last minute party, tossed out an invitation on facebook, ordered food from ShopRite catering, and celebrated a soldier's return, a daughter's bachelor's degree, and a 60th birthday milestone.



A week later I taught for 5 days at Peters Valley Craft Center and took Brianna with me, since she hadn't started work yet. Brianna took a five day beginning blacksmithing class. I have a hand forged magic wand. I wish I knew how to use it.

A week later Kevin flew to Ireland for two months. Kevin achieved million mile status on United during this trip. We both now have permanent Gold status on United with all its perks.

While the kids settled into their new lives, we

all adjusted to having them back home. Brianna managed to find a job working at Cedar Grove animal hospital within five days of her return home, and Eric tried to navigate his way back to reality. He described his deployment this way, "I hated every minute of it and would do it again in a heartbeat". He was promoted to sergeant while he was deployed. He resumed his job at Target in July. We are all so very proud of both of them.



In July I took a long needed vacation, a real vacation, and with my sister, flew to Copenhagen, and then on to an island called Ven in the Øresund Strait between Landskrona and Copenhagen, to stay for 10 days with one of my oldest and dearest friends, Annika, who was a Swedish exchange student living with our family my senior year of high school. Our 60th birthdays were four days apart. To say this was the most perfect vacation would be an understatement. I came home renewed and ready to face the world!



The rest of the summer flew by, teaching, traveling and the end of August I returned to Peters Valley to teach another 5 day workshop and this time I took Kevin with me. He was able to take a low light photography course. It was one of the best experiences I've ever had there as an instructor and having Kevin there a part of it made it extra special.

The day after we returned from the Valley our world came to a screeching halt. Kevin was diagnosed with stage 3 esophageal cancer. He was also eventually diagnosed with unrelated thyroid cancer, but in the total scheme of things, no one is very worried about that.

And thus life took us all down that rabbit hole of seeking out opinions, second opinions, recommendations for doctors, interviews, tests, tests, and more tests. I traveled most of September to Maine, New Hampshire and Kansas. Juggling all of this and my work commitments kept me teetering on the edge of insanity. My first thought was to cancel everything but that was neither realistic nor practical. And so when I wasn't available, our lovely, strong, wonderful children stepped up to the plate, and grew up very fast.

By mid October treatment had begun, chemo every week and radiation every day for 5 weeks. Kevin was treated at Hackensack University Hospital, a world renowned treatment center for cancer, but the

commute was long and dreary. Infusion days were also long. Mostly Kevin slept and I got a lot of knitting done. Friends occasionally stepped in to take Kevin to radiation, and we are forever grateful for those angels. As Kevin neared the end of treatment, the effects finally took their toll, and he began to have extreme difficulty eating and holding down food. He lost most of his hair and about 50 pounds. And once again, I had a heavy travel schedule booked for November, first to the west coast and then almost immediately to Florida.

Without listing all the sordid details, let's just say that this period was probably the darkest for Kevin, and really for all of us; three trips to the ER, two by ambulance, one after Kevin collapsed in a Home Depot trying to buy me a new dishwasher. Challenging isn't a strong enough word.

Thanksgiving was a time of gathering, and giving thanks and my sisters descended upon us with food and family in tow. It meant a lot to us to have them here and we are forever grateful that we could all be together.



Kevin is beginning to improve and to be able to eat again. Many more doctors visits and tests are still to come. The long term prognosis for esophageal cancer isn't great. But for now, we are seeing the light at the end of a really dark tunnel. And yet in spite of everything there is so much to be grateful for. Both kids are home, which is huge. They are ready and able to help as their job schedules allow. The support, prayers and comfort from the local community, local churches, friends, family, the fiber

community, Kevin's office and co workers, and people we don't even know, have made this journey bearable. Social media helps with updates; I didn't have that when I went through cancer 13 years ago. We are hopeful Kevin will gain back enough strength to go back to work, and enjoy the winter, and maybe even do some gardening next spring. For now we are grateful for the smallest steps toward recovery each day.

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times... Thank you all for your prayers and support. We are hoping that 2016 brings healing, hope, and less drama, for the world, for our friends and family and for our own.

Kevin, Daryl, Eric and Brianna.