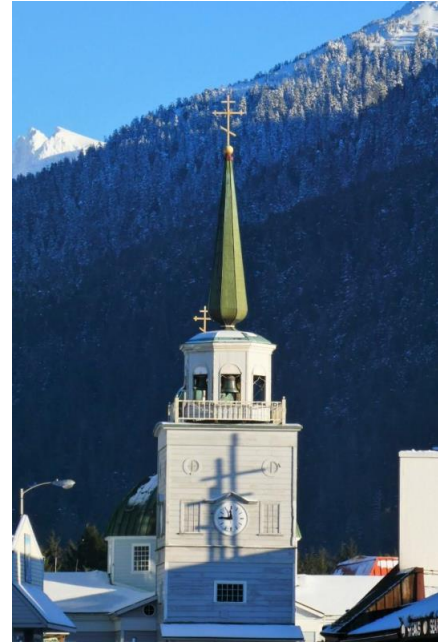


December 2021

Dear Friends,

We had planned to be in Europe with the kids and grandkids for Christmas markets this year, but canceled when the Delta variant hit. Good decision. Some markets opened and were abruptly closed, some never made it to the opening bell.

The Pandemic did allow us to get to know our newest grandson, Elias, a lot better. Kevin and Shannon, who live in Anchorage, work for the State from home, and “home” can be anywhere in Alaska. So, in April they came to Sitka and worked from here while we looked after Elias, who was just shy of two and lives at an exhausting pace. Rich became “Grandpa Squish” because they bonded over playdough. Suzi became “Grandma No” because, well, she was the one who had to say no. Elias did not hold it against her if the smile and hug she got in July and the welcome in December are any indication.



In July Brian, Liam and Fiona came to Sitka for the 4th. There is nothing like a small-town 4th. Then ALL the Alaska McClears flew to Minnesota. After admiring Brian and Liz’s new house in Minneapolis, all 9 of us gathered for a week at a ski condo at Lutsen on Lake Superior’s North Shore. We enjoyed each other’s company, setting out on day trips and walking along dry riverbeds. Usually, rivers flow into the lake. Not this drought year. We had to imagine Gooseberry Falls.

Back in Alaska the two of us took a weeklong Cruise on a small ship owned by Sitka’s Allen Marine. We reconnected with parts of SE Alaska we hadn’t seen in years. We also reconnected with whales, seals, sealions, bears and calving glaciers. Let’s just say Rich is happy he no longer must pay for film. Everyone on board was vaccinated and tested. But the week after we got home, we both had breakthrough COVID.

Suzi’s infection was asymptomatic, but Rich ended up in the hospital, on IV drips. He’s grateful for the dedication of the health care workers who risked their health every time they came into his room. It took them the better part of 10 minutes to “suit up” before coming in. Each time they left they filled a small wastebasket with contaminated plastic. We are both appalled at how much Medicare had to pay to get him healthy. It was a slow recovery, but Rich is back taking his walks. We’ve both had our boosters.

In early December we traveled to both Minnesota and Anchorage to visit the kids and grandkids. We helped Brian, Liz and the kids decorate their tree and had 8th night Channukah celebrations, and great latkes, with our Jewish (and Christian) relatives. In Anchorage we saw Kevin and Shannon’s new home in Eagle River. We were there the day they moved and were happy to do some Elias sitting.

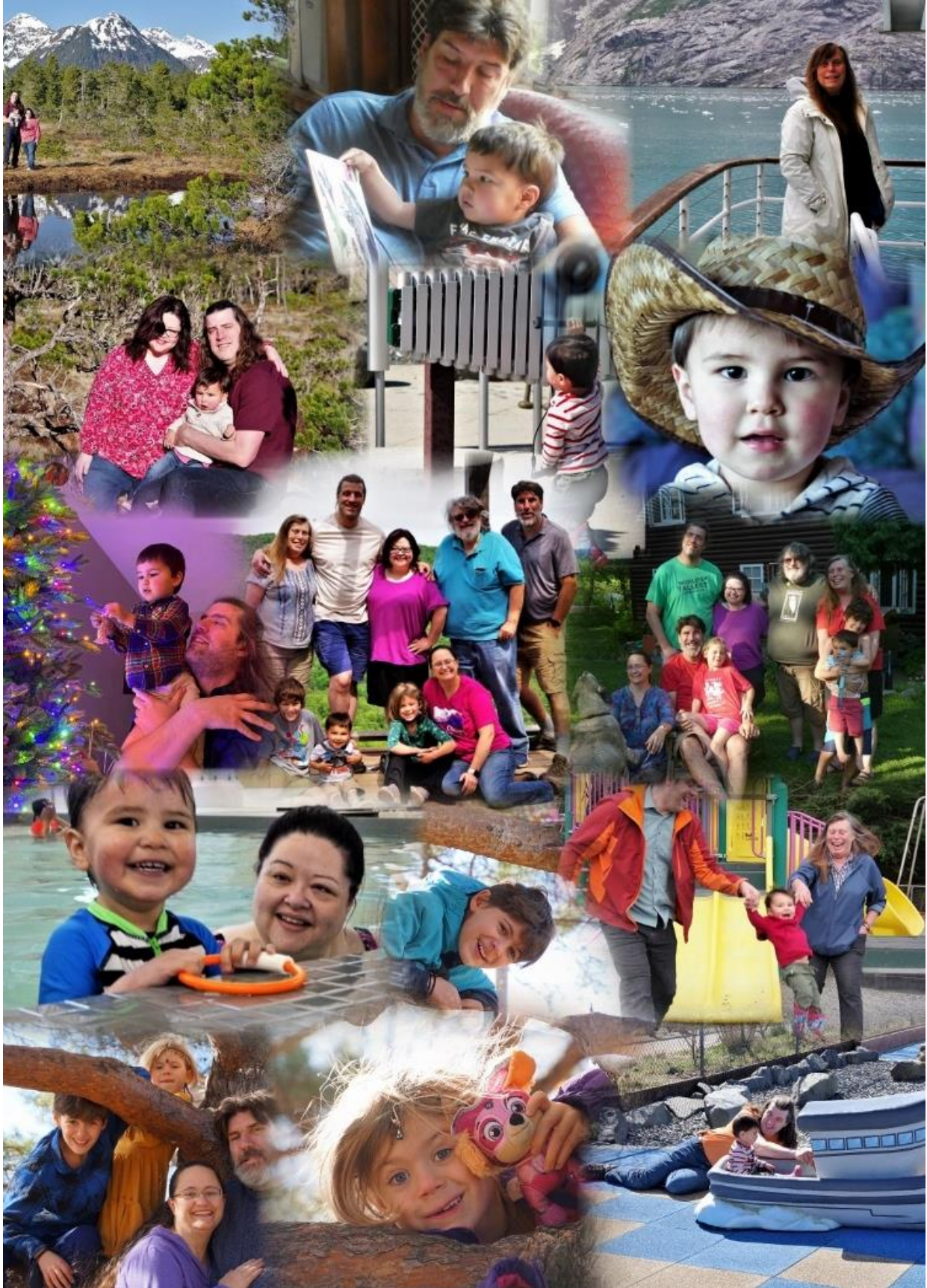


This fall we both turned 75 and are slowing down – a little. We’re just saving our energy for a more active 2022 and are grateful for all the blessings we have received. Now if Rich could only get a haircut! We wish you all the happiest of holidays no matter which holidays you celebrate, and we pray for a peaceful and healthy year for us all.

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Rich blogs at <https://rich.mcclear.net>

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