

## The 2013 Waite Family Christmas Letter

Thanks for reading our annual roundup. This was our first full year as empty nesters. With Alex at USC and David at the U of Colorado in Boulder, it's gotten very quiet. At least, it was quiet until Hagrid came to live with us. Who is Hagrid? Listen while we tell you the tale. It's a bit long, so please indulge us.

Fall of 2012, we were at the cabin for a week of vacation. One night, a horrible clattering noise awakened us. After some cautious investigation, we spotted a big red dog with a ten foot length of chain caught on the side steps. He'd been going up and down the steps dragging the chain. Relieved that we weren't going to be the next victims in a B-grade horror film, we undid the chain and put him on Nicks' cable in the back yard. He seemed to be a very nice dog who got along with Nicks right away. After hours of calls to area vets and posting on local message boards, we called animal control to pick him up. Later that week, we found out a kid down the block owned him, and his family couldn't afford to bail him out of the pound. Feeling guilty, we officially adopted "Spike." This involved getting him fixed, chipped, and all that good stuff and returning him to his young owner. Happy ending, yes?

Fast forward to October of this year. Barry received a call from animal control that they had Spike again. Since we had adopted him last year, we were the owners. We dug up the paperwork and called the kid who told us the dog ran away too often, so they couldn't keep him. We didn't want him put to sleep, so we picked him up. The fun began mere minutes later.

It was a long drive home, and he jumped on Barry as the car turned onto the freeway, nearly turning the car over an embankment. At home, we found Spike was fascinated with cats. Specifically, he seemed to want to eat our cats, James and Ron. He also had the habit of jumping on counters to get food, real or imagined. He needed a friendlier name, so he became Hagrid, the big, hairy and loyal oaf of Harry Potter fame. A visit to the vet showed he was a healthy 72 pounds and a mixture of Rottweiler and "other" the vet could not identify.

Luckily, a dog obedience class was starting the next Tuesday, so we signed him up in desperation. Hagrid did better than many of the dogs. At least, he did until he lifted his leg and peed on Barry. The trainer said, "Oh, he's marking you as his!" Oh goody. At the second class, he did not pee on anyone and did pretty well but he was super hyper at home, so he was put in the laundry room for bedtime. In the night, we heard Nicks barking. Margie went to check and found Hagrid on top of the washing machine eating a Costco size container of dog treats. Evidently, Nicks did not want all her snacks eaten by that other dog.

Barry let the dogs out early one Sunday. When he went to let them back in, Hagrid was gone. He had climbed the back fence and was in the neighbor's yard. Barry climbed over with a leash and found the gate was latched from the other side. The attempt to carry him back over the fence nearly resulted in severe injuries to both of them. A trip around the block rescued the errant pup. We spent the next two days replacing that section of fence. Then we saw him climb a pile of debris at the back of the yard and realized we didn't need a new fence after all. It does look nice though.

Coming home from work one day, there was no Hagrid in the back yard. A message on the answering machine was animal control with the number of a neighbor with the wayward beast. A block away, there he was being held patiently by a little boy with a very thin leash. As we talked with his dad, the boy was prodding the dog's mouth, while Hagrid just stood there calmly. Maybe this was meant to be his new home! We asked if they wanted a dog. They have cats. Dang.

A day or so after that, he bounded over the short fence on one side of the house to a big stump and from there onto the roof of the neighbor's garage. What goes up must come down. This time we just had to wait. We have stopped letting him in the back yard unless escorted on a leash. Yes, that means he gets to stay in the house all the time. But he has to be kept away from the cats, so our house is a maze of plywood barriers and gates. Not exactly ready for a Better Homes and Gardens photo shoot. At bed time, the cats and the cat box get moved to the living room, Nicks goes to the dining room, and Hagrid gets the hallway outside our room. It seems to be an uneasy peace.

It hasn't been all bad. In the middle of the night at the cabin, Hagrid started to bark. He rarely barks at all, and he sounded scary. Then we heard a man's voice right outside the back door. If you're going to do one thing right, scaring away bad guys is a good one to pick.

At the final obedience class, each dog was to do a trick. One danced on his hind legs and another pretended to fall dead when his owner pointed at him and said, "Bang!" Hagrid's trick was to eat food out of Barry's hand without biting him. Good boy. He didn't pee on him either. Good boy.

Since the dogs are in the house so much, we now have a daily long walk with them, which is very much cutting into our sedentary ways. At this rate, we will have to start eating more junk to stay out of shape. Plus, at least one of us has to be home from work at a reasonable hour, sometimes it is even Margie.

We do have other news to share. Ed Brickman (Barry's step-dad) and Donna Hayes (Margie's mom) passed away this year. Both of them very giving and fun people we miss terribly, and we wonder if they sent us Hagrid to keep our empty nest busy, working at least a little less and definitely walking more. They both had a sense of humor, so we wouldn't put it past them. We recommend that you check out this link to see Hagrid's kindred spirits of the dog world: <http://distractify.com/fun/fails/dogs-who-are-shamelessly-proud-of-what-they-just-did/>. We look forward to hearing from you in the coming year. Would you like a dog?

Barry, Margie, Alex & David Waite

Hagrid Holidays to you and yours from us and ours!



Hagrid and Nicks in the car. Yes, that's plywood keeping them in the back seat.