

Surprise! We have our Christmas letter out before Christmas. We usually get the final letters out in the mail by December 26. It's been a year full of surprises! Have you figured out this year's theme yet?

Here's the biggest surprise, Margie retired! Yes, the patron saint of accountant martyrs decided she'd had enough. In May, she gave up the corporate rat race in favor of not racing at all. She told them back in January she would be leaving and booked a retirement celebration trip to Seattle. As the date neared, they needed more of her time. So surprise, she returned after her trip to work a few more weeks. Okay, you weren't surprised at all by that. Before, she had over a dozen employees, and now she has just one, and that's Barry. She's about to give him a performance review. He'd better watch out, or he'll get a work improvement plan.

Another big surprise – Alex got engaged! His fiancée is Alise, and we love her dearly. They plan to get married in May. About the same time they got engaged, Alex got another nice surprise – he passed all his exams and is a licensed Professional Engineer (caps required of course). He is working hard with the same firm he's been with for a while designing water treatment systems. Clean water is good!

Barry was surprised when planning for the fall semester at USC to find that he wasn't teaching all the classes he thought he was. "Gee, we didn't tell you?" You don't know bureaucracy until you know university bureaucracy.

How long does a Subaru last? In the case of Margie's, it turned out to be 19 years. While it was at the mechanic being made at least drivable after a breakdown, we bought a new one. Surprise! The mechanic said the problem was a bad radiator with everything else being in great shape. You're kidding, right? Too late! The new Subaru is fun to drive, maintenance free, and uses a lot less gas. It doesn't have a cassette player though. Bummer. We donated the old one to NPR, so think of it as you listen to the radio.

In August, Barry got a big surprise when he felt a stabbing in his throat while singing. After it happened a few times, he went to the doctor who identified an ulcer on his vocal cords from singing incorrectly. The doctor said it would heal on its own and that Barry should take voice lessons to avoid future issues. No problem! Except he's supposed to avoid singing or speaking much. For a guy who makes his living by talking and has singing as his hobby, that's rough. Especially with so many singing gigs at Christmas!

We took a vacation to Florida. That's no surprise. What is a surprise was that it was the first vacation over a weeklong we had taken since 2000. We took a Caribbean cruise with our friends Bob and Martha. When we booked it, we

didn't know a hurricane was about to hit Nassau and Freeport. Surprise! The best meal of the cruise surprisingly was at a little shack on the beach in Nassau. Good eats!

We spent a few days with Alise's parents in Miami where we got to see a Gilded Age estate and took a fan boat ride through the Everglades. We got to see some alligators swimming a distance from the boat. Barry looked down at the side of the boat and saw one staring up at him from four feet away. Surprise! Then it was off to spend three days at Epcot, Universal Studios Orlando and Disneyworld. According to our Fitbits, we walked 26 miles in three days. The big surprise was that neither of us got hurt (much).

We produced a murder-mystery play at church, and Barry got to play the part of the deceased. He worked hard at maintaining the proper level of deadness. Margie handled all the off-stage stuff like food, costumes, casting, tickets, sales, publicity, and the things like that. Barry played dead. He did surprisingly well.

David couldn't join us for Thanksgiving. He had the week off from school but got a nasty surprise. One of his professors sent a list of a few little (meaning huge) projects to do for the week. He spent Thanksgiving Day in the studio working with his equally stuck colleagues. One year to go after this one in Rhode Island before he finishes grad school. In January, he'll be doing a construction project in Mexico.

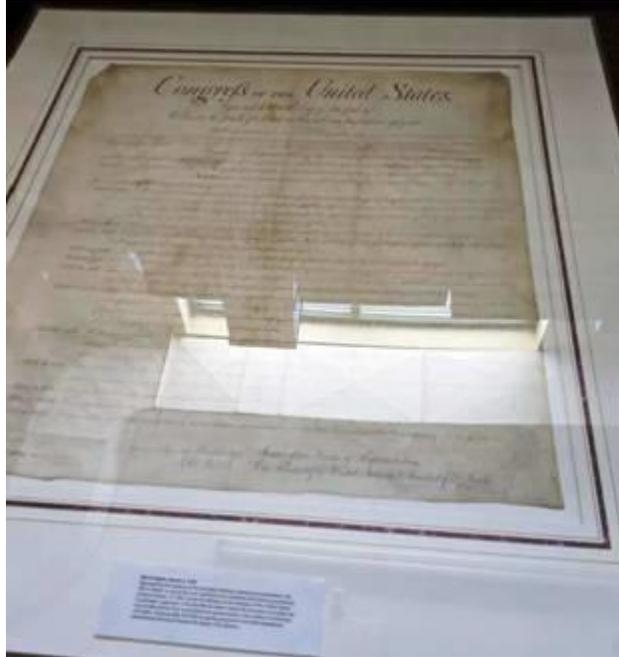
### The Waitz Family



It's official, she's got a ring!



Margie celebrating her retirement with friends on the Puget Sound.



While doing some research in Rhode Island, David came across the state's copy of the Declaration of Independence! Each of the 13 colonies got one. Most of those are gone!



Soaking up the sun off Freeport in the Bahamas on a glass-bottom boat tour.



Barry got to sing a song with the Dapper Dans at Disneyworld



We had to say goodbye to James (left) after a happy 17-year life. His brother, Ron, is doing fine.