



Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from the Blyths!

It has been three years since our last newsletter. While the “code” of our daily lives hasn’t changed much, the version updates have been significant.

The Gift of “Aha” Moments

After a couple of years of working part-time at a great pediatric practice, I officially retired a year ago. I’ve spent much of my time since as a volunteer math, statistics, and computer science tutor with [Upchieve](#). This program is a great approach to educational inequality: it provides free, 24/7 online tutoring to low-income middle and high school students.

The highlight for me isn’t just the teaching; it’s that specific moment when a student who has been struggling or feeling far behind suddenly tells me they finally “get it.” Watching a student’s confidence shift after they ace an assignment they thought was impossible is so rewarding. Upchieve is always looking for volunteers, and the schedule is totally open—you just log on when you have a spare 30 minutes. If you

are looking for a high-impact way to use some spare time, I'd love to talk to you about it. Check it at <https://www.upchieve.org>.

Adaptability and Resilience

Barb is finding new ways to stay involved at church, contributing to her Bible study and helping prepare meals for a local homeless center. As for activities, while her vision loss has made reading impossible and writing and cooking more difficult, she is finding ways to cope such as reading lots of audio books. We've found a modern workaround for our evening entertainment: Barb uses a Quest VR headset instead of a TV. The lenses help her see films with much more clarity, and we've spent many good evenings enjoying shows like *The Good Karma Hospital* and *Miss Scarlet*.

Milestones: From Tuscany to California

Last year marked our 50th anniversary. We used it as the perfect excuse for a two-week trip to Italy in April, soaking in the scenery, history and art of Tuscany, Rome, and Milan. In contrast, a more somber milestone was a trip to California this month for a memorial service for Barb's brother Bob. While it was a sad occasion, being surrounded by family in California provided a meaningful opportunity to reconnect and remember why these relationships are so vital.

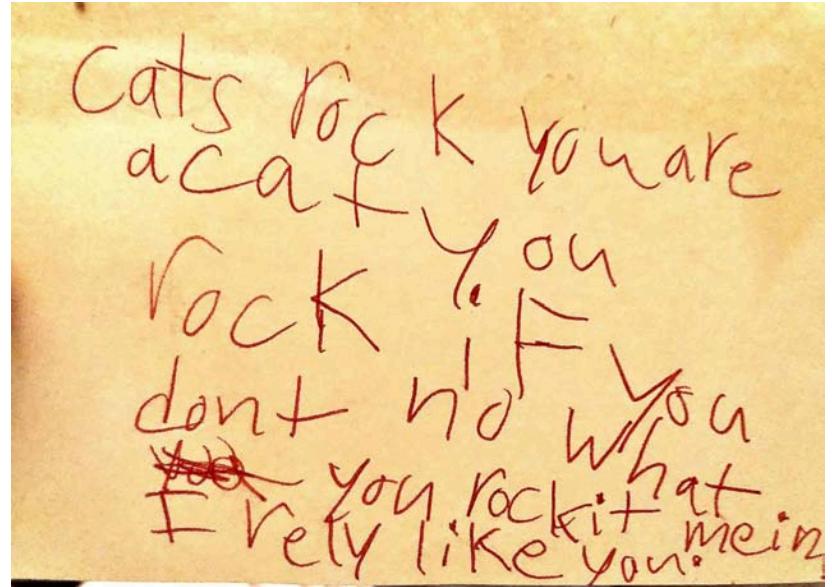
Family Close to Home:

We've been blessed to have Lisa's and Saralynn's families living in the same apartment complex as us for the past two years.

- Lisa: We've been so impressed watching Lisa balance the rigors of full-time nursing school with parenting. She doesn't just cope with the workload, but genuinely loves the academics and clinical experience.
- Saralynn continues to thrive as an administrator at Georgetown, where her wizardry with Excel and logistics keeps the French department running smoothly. We love having her so close by, where we get to see her latest crocheted blankets and hear updates on her favorite audiobooks and all things Star Trek.
- Our most recent college graduate, Siah, is living with us while he trains to become a firefighter—having him here is a real bonus for us. Meanwhile, Naomi is wrapping up her degree in film, Ethan is headed to the University of Alabama on a full National Merit scholarship, and Timothy is aiming for UCLA or Howard University.

- The “Littles,” Miriam (9) and Selah (7), are a constant source of fun. Selah recently wrote a note to the family cat: “Cats rock. You are a cat. You rock. If you don’t know what you rock, it means I really like you.”

Further afield, Jonathan and Kelly, married last year, are enjoying life with our newest grandchild, Willow, in Milwaukee. In Bakersfield, Luke remains our resident history buff. While walking is becoming harder and more painful for him despite physical therapy, he is still able to visit us for several weeks each December.



Final Thoughts

Like many of you, we have become more than just “politically engaged;” we view the current state of our nation as the crisis of our lifetime. We have been aghast to watch the decline of a stable, law-based democracy and the rise of authoritarianism and the demonization of others. Having lived in authoritarian and failing countries, we recognize these patterns with a visceral clarity and have no desire to see them repeated here. With Lisa as our star encourager, we have channeled this alarm into action—participating in protests, voter mobilization, and advocacy. We urge you to join us in this critical work.

We’ll leave you with a few recommendations that moved us this year:

- Books: *Everything Sad is Untrue* by Daniel Nyeri (a beautiful storytelling memoir) and both *The Covenant of Water* and *Cutting for Stone* by Abraham Verghese. For a historical perspective on our current climate, we recommend *Jesus and John Wayne* by Kristin Kobes Du Mez. For fun with a serious twist, the Don Tillman series (starting with *The Rosie Project*) by Graeme C. Simsion kept us laughing on long road trips.
- Screen: *The Visitor* (2007) and *The Samuel Project* (2018) were two of many standout films for us this year.

Wishing you a year of progress, “aha” moments, and cats that rock.

Mike and Barbara Blyth

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And even more ...

Saralynn's *Jordyn* (9th grade) is a cheer leader. She adores her new cat and enjoys watching K-drama (Korean) and listening to music.

Jonathan & Kelly (married last year) live in Milwaukee, where Jonathan is an underground utilities locator finding those pipes and cables before construction companies work in the area. Our newest grandchild, Willow, is an adorable toddler. Michael (Kelly's 13 year old) is a puzzle fan and likes games and science books. Rowan and Lily (Ian) are getting started with their adult lives in Milwaukee as well. Alethea (13) likes art and reading. Branwyn (15) is an anime fan, while Bose (16) likes K-pop and reading; she'd like to become a veterinarian.

Another sad family loss occurred with the passing of our nephew Matt Denton in May. His son, Killian, is holding Matt's photo at this gathering of the family.



More details about books we've liked:

- *Everything Sad is Untrue* by Daniel Nyeri. A unique, storytelling memoir that uses a young boy's perspective to bridge the gap between his family's rich history in Iran and their difficult start as refugees in America.
- *Cutting for Stone* and *The Covenant of Water* by Abraham Verghese. Excellent cross-cultural novels involving families, medicine, India, Ethiopia, the US.
- *Lovely One: A Memoir* by Ketanji Brown Jackson.
- *The Rosie Project* and *The Rosie Effect* by Graeme C. Simsion. Great humor with some serious thoughts. Perfectionist Don Tillman has trouble forming relationships but wants to get married. To find the perfect wife, he develops a 27-page questionnaire. Interesting events follow.
- *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation*, by Kristin Kobes Du Mez (professor of history at Calvin University), for one perspective on understanding how we got where we are now.

Photos

See our highlights of 2025 photos [here](#) and highlights of our Italy trip [here](#)



Lisa, Mike and Barb



Lisa and Mike got a snippet on NBC News in San Diego while protesting in front of the US Supreme Court.



Michael, Lily, Branwyn, Rowan, Bose, Jonathan, Alethea, Willow





Barb with siblings Brian, Brenda, Ben, and William at Bob's Memorial

Italy



