

The Skinny

(the Somewhat delayed, Kind of Intermittent Newsletter for the New Year)

Published March 17, 2022 (finally!)

a “holiday” newsletter from the desk of
Peter Kauffmann and Julia Alspaugh

Happy 2019, everybody!

What’s that?

You’re saying it’s already 2022 and we haven’t put out a newsletter in four years? Well... let’s hope that’s not the case, because that’d be really damaging to our well-established reputation for punctuality that absolutely exists and isn’t just something we wish we had.

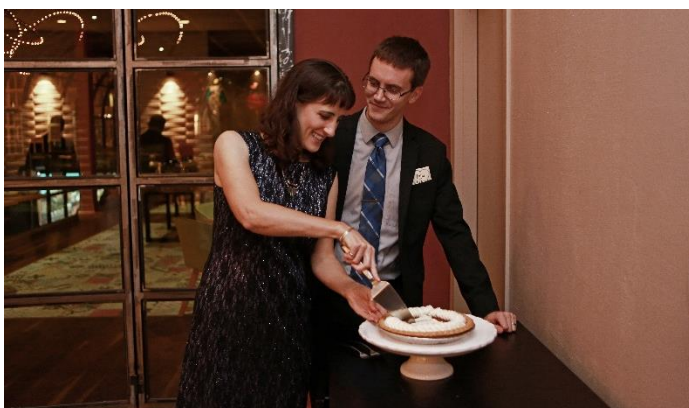
And that’s on top of the fact that the intervening years were full of Major Life Events for the two of us, so let’s get right to a rundown of what all we’ve been remiss in telling everybody about since the New Year’s 2018 edition.

Big News: We Got Married!

After years of dating, we finally tied the knot and were married in a “courthouse” ceremony (really a retired judge’s office) on Pi Day, March 14, 2018. Thanks to Richard & Shannon for serving as witnesses/photographers!



We expanded a planned trip to the UK in May 2018 into a honeymoon (more on that later), with subsequent celebrations with Memphis friends in August and an official reception with family and East Coast (and nationwide) friends in October in Raleigh. Thanks to our families for all their help in organizing and hosting the event, and an even bigger thanks to all those who were with us in person or in spirit to celebrate!



Of course we had a pi pie for our wedding “cake”

Slightly Less Big but Significantly More Expensive News: We Bought a House!

Julia’s two-bedroom apartment in Memphis had served her well since 2014, but it became clear pretty soon after Peter moved in during fall 2016 that we needed more space. We spent much of spring/summer 2018 figuring out what we were looking for and trying to find something vaguely affordable yet new enough to have modern-ish closets/bathrooms.

Long story short is that our “new” address is:

242 Alexander Street, Memphis, TN 38111



Definitely look us up if you’re ever crossing the Mississippi on I-40 (yes, that was our bridge in the news last summer) or are looking for a weekend getaway. We’re still waiting for a visitor who wants to see Graceland for us to check it out ourselves.

Professional Updates: Julia Launches a New Product

Julia continues her work in R&D as a Senior Staff Engineer working on patient-specific instruments for total ankle replacement. In 2020 Wright Medical was bought by Stryker, a larger medical device firm, but for the most part her role has not significantly changed aside from a new manager (a first after 7.5 years; fortunately she still works with Paul in other capacities) and being in the “Digital” group.



Industry conferences in 2021 (Charlotte and Austin) were a great opportunity for Julia to train surgeons and also see family over the weekend (Aunt Martha & Uncle Rick, Granddaddy, and Dot one last time; Karen and Ada)!

The big work news was that in 2021, Julia launched her first product! Look up “Prophecy Infinity Resect-Through” if you want to know more. During development, she and Dave submitted multiple patent applications – tune in to The Skinny many years from now to see if they are granted. Her next focus is getting a second product over the finish line later this year.

Professional Updates: Peter Gets a New Job

In some surprisingly pertinent BREAKING NEWS, Peter is currently in the process of changing jobs! After 5.5 years at Barge Design Solutions (renamed from Barge, Waggoner, Sumner, and Cannon as of the last newsletter) he will be starting as a Senior Traffic Engineer for HDR, a much bigger firm with an international footprint, at the end of March.

Peter’s proud of the work he did at Barge, particularly some safety-focused corridor redesigns on projects in Atlanta, Nashville, and Cincinnati. He’s sad to be leaving behind a lot of good friends at Barge but is excited for the opportunity to work on larger traffic projects, chip in on more ped/bike-focused designs, and gain new skills in transportation planning and public transit. In that last category he hopes to leverage his new “AICP” planning credential after passing the American Institute of Certified Planners exam in May 2019 following months and months of intensive studying.



Peter leads a pedestrian safety audit near Vanderbilt University

Pandemic Pastimes

When mid-March 2020 came around and the COVID-19 pandemic shut everything down in Memphis and around the globe, we both started working from home full time and did not leave town for many months. Things we learned: Julia has a LOT more meetings and calls than Peter; Peter talks very loudly on the phone; personal projects take more time than you expect, even when you have all weekends at home; and a Zoom call can be the highlight of a weekend. We greatly appreciated catching up and playing virtual games with people!

When the outdoors became the only safe place to meet up, we stocked up on handwarmers (and layers) and/or bug spray and used them both liberally to stay social safely. One highlight of outdoor meetups was stopping to see Granddaddy and Great Aunt Helen multiple times in Greensboro on our eventual road trips to and from North Carolina.



Thank goodness they had a fan in the shade. It was HOT in June

Socially distanced porch dinners became a thing (finally our extra large porch had a purpose!), which doubled as a way to share the bounty of our newly acquired and growing skills with cocktail mixing. What’s that, you didn’t know we were amateur mixologists? When we signed up for a 3-part cocktail class in March 2020, we didn’t expect it, either. It turned into a two year long, semiweekly educational and social event, and we made a bunch of new friends! Over the summer of 2020, Julia even created some Star Wars-themed cocktails and taught the class how to make one of them.



Julia presents her workshop cocktail “The Gin Erso” in character as Jyn Erso from Rogue One

Other pastimes included solving puzzles while watching movies, hiking/kayaking with Richard & Shannon and Betsy & Jason (also, camping), and exploring Memphis’s roads and trails by bike. While taking MANY more walks around the neighborhood and with the help of the Merlin app, Julia has made significant progress on being able to identify local birds by their calls.



At the TN-AR state line on the “Big River Crossing” pedestrian bridge

Other Household News

Peter bought a new Subaru Crosstrek in January 2019 after his trusty '05 Outback started giving him not-so-subtle hints that it needed to be replaced, most notably when most of the exhaust system fell out of the car!



New Car, Old Kayaks: Thanks to the Sarahans for storing Peter's family's boats in Richmond until we had a way to get them!

Since the last Skinny, unfortunately, the remaining gerbils have passed away, mostly due to old age. TJ was the last to stick around and was hopefully too blind in the end to see the next cage over... because Julia bought a snake (!!!) in 2019. His name is Pythagoras ("Thag"), he's a ball python, he's extremely chill, and no we did not once let him hang out with the gerbils.



Thag has a hard time fitting in one hand anymore; this was late 2020

Julia completed two terms as President and then two terms as Treasurer for the local Society of Women Engineers Professional (non-student) section, presiding over a time of significant growth in the section. After taking more of a breather in 2021 to focus on product launches, she is on the ballot in the current election cycle running unopposed for a position as the SWE global organization's Senate Secretary.

Highlights of Julia's years include organizing BIG group watches at the movie theatre on opening night for all Star Wars and Marvel movies until the Pandemic hit, *slowly* learning Spanish with Tim through a course at work, winning a Nintendo Switch

in a raffle resulting in many, many hours of playing Zelda, listening to numerous audiobooks while doing yardwork (LOTS of hacking away at vines covering our property's assortment of azaleas), and occasionally doing crafting/sewing. Media highlights include finishing all 6 of the Dune books by Frank Herbert, getting sucked into high fantasy again through the Stormlight Archive series, and the Disney+ TV shows (especially WandaVision, Loki, and The Mandalorian).

Julia as Rey in her homemade costume on opening night for Star Wars Episode IX



Travel Updates

Understandably we haven't been doing as many big trips in the past two years (a lot more trips by car!) but we've still managed to get out and about a fair bit and wanted to take a moment to thank all the people who've traveled with or hosted us!

UK Honeymoon (May/June 2018)

After our Pi Day wedding, we decided to expand a planned trip to visit some of Julia's UK friends from her assistantship in Dijon. Highlights included touring London and visiting with Ellie, Paddy, Mary Beth, Lindsay, Will, Kirsty, Samir, and Paola, trips to Stonehenge and York, and a day spent hiking in the Peak District with Kirsty & Will. We also were able to take a jaunt up to Scotland with Pao to see Glasgow and Edinburgh, including countless historical sites, a distillery visit, and a stop at Peter's favorite bridge in the world (he was very excited!)



The Tower Bridge is great and all, but it's no Firth of Forth bridge

Quebec (May 2019)

We were fortunate to travel with Julia's mom's side of the family to Quebec City, a historic francophone city that gave Julia a great opportunity to practice her language skills. We stayed in the Old City, taking numerous walking trips and even a guided food tour, as well as day trips to the pastoral Île d'Orléans and stunning Montmorency Falls.



The scenic cable car fortunately fit our whole family group

California (June 2019)

A trip west was next on the list, beginning with a few days in the Bay Area hosted by Peter's relatives Bill & Nina, including trips to Alcatraz, Muir Woods and Marin County, and a visit with cousins Vic & Noel ahead of an Imogen Heap concert.



Julia on Mount Tamalpais. Thanks for showing us around, Bill!

We then transited to Yosemite, camping in the valley with Julia's friend Tonia and spending four days hiking up and down the valley walls, trekking through the trees, and generally soaking up the scenic beauty all around. The three of us then continued north through the foothills wine country, with an overnight hosted by Peter's cousin Heather & Family at their apple ranch, culminating in a day touring Sacramento with Tonia.



We were lucky enough to snag permits to climb Half Dome

Utah Grand Circle Tour (November 2019)

Our Thanksgiving trip to visit Peter's mom and stepdad in Prescott AZ began with an early Thanksgiving with Peter's great aunt, before traveling north to visit ALL FIVE national parks in

Utah: Zion, Bryce Canyon, Capitol Reef, Canyonlands, and Arches, passing through Monument Valley on the return. We had intended to camp the whole time in the parks... but Brad thankfully suggested a hotel once it got down consistently below 30°F overnight! Amazing hiking and stunning natural formations were to be found around every turn – all parks are must see!



Also: A trek through stunning Antelope Canyon

Costa Rica (January 2020)

Our last big international trip had extremely fortunate timing, from a pandemic perspective. Julia had a trip to Costa Rica for work to lead hands-on training for her coworkers in the office near San José. She was able to extend her trip a few days and Peter also traveled down, his first visit. Together we saw Jaco beach, La Fortuna and Arenal volcano, and met up with Pao to visit hot springs and Monteverde cloud forest.



Catarata Rio Agrio, a waterfall visited mostly by local Ticos

π^{th} Anniversary (May 2021)

Kris and Denise independently figured out that our 3.14159th anniversary would fall on May the Fourth, aka Star Wars Day. We'd been vaccinated and figured it was a perfect opportunity to take a big trip and experience Galaxy's Edge, aka Star Wars Land. As expected, it was very well done. Extremely immersive; so much attention to detail!

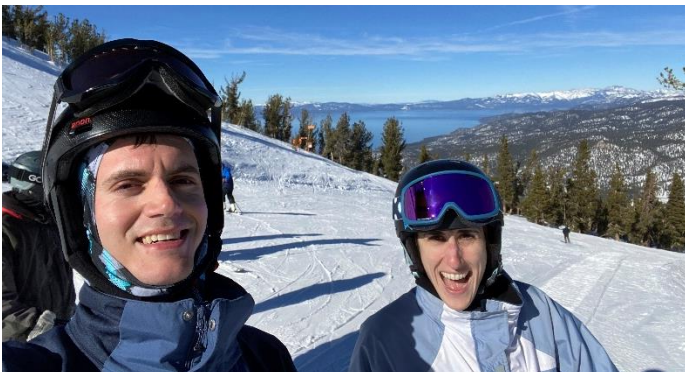


...only one of us made a lightsaber

We spent a whirlwind 6 days in Disney and one day at Universal, racking up an average of 13 miles a day walking. Highlights were the Rise of the Resistance ride (we've never experienced ride mechanics like this before; don't spoil it before you go), Hagrid's motorbike roller coaster (well themed, and it really felt like being on a motorcycle!), and the still-in-previews VelociCoaster (WOW. Lots of upside-down and zero-g... just WOW).

Tahoe Ski Trip (January 2022)

We have remained hesitant to travel internationally with case surges and variants, so we decided to stay in the US and go skiing for the first time in ~10 years. We trained up and flew out west for Peter's first experience on properly big mountains. Highlights were a fantastic half day of lessons, skiing with Tom and meeting Dani, perfect timing off the lift to ski newly groomed runs after a delayed opening due to winds, and our first snowshoe trek.



Heavenly: slopes with views of Lake Tahoe, on the CA/NV state line!

The Lightning Round

Those big trips just scratch the surface of our travels, and we'd be remiss if we didn't give shoutouts to all the other run-ins over the past few years, plus a few more happenings of note.

- We were honored to attend the weddings of **Matt & Alisha**, **Dima & Alex**, **Paul & Katie**, **Zach & Sarah**, **DJ & Laura**, **Ricky & Samantha**, and **David & Carson**. Thanks so much for including us in your celebrations!
- **A collection of concerts:** David Byrne, Imogen Heap, Madeon, The 1975, Pomplamoose, Tall Heights, They Might Be Giants, Two Door Cinema Club, Walk Off the Earth, Weird Al, and Hamilton (which we somehow saw 4 times??)
- Zach & Sarah celebrated "**Bealehenge**" with us in April 2018



The setting sun aligns with downtown Memphis' east-west streets

- Meeting up with Denise & Dustin for a **Memorial Day 2018 camping trip to Mammoth Cave, KY**; including crawling through their "wild cave tour" plus visits to local distilleries
- **Sightseeing in New York City** after Dima/Alex's wedding, including visiting Peter's Uncle Chris and seeing both parts of Harry Potter & the Cursed Child on Broadway followed by the Empire State Building's observation deck at midnight
- **Brad & Elaine hosted us in Chicago twice**, for Elaine's birthday in 2018 (including dinner at Michelin-starred Alinea) and Julia's birthday in 2021 (featuring Lost Lake tropical bar)
- **Thanksgiving 2018** saw us visit Julia's family in DC, including a side trip to go rock climbing with Matt & Alisha
- **2018 Holidays** included a marathon road trip to visit both sides of Julia's family in NC, Peter's family in Richmond, and some of our DC-area friends
- **Visiting Denise in Seattle** was on tap for Memorial Day 2019, including a sunny hike through deep snow to Mowitch Lake on the slopes of Mt. Rainier and Peter's first ever overnight stay in Texas thanks to a flight delay at DFW
- **We learned how to play golf** courtesy of a class through Southwest TN Community College. Thanks to Lauren & Adam for joining us for our first game (130 is good, right?)
- **Memphis got a minor league soccer team.** We try to hit up a couple of games a year; anybody want to join us?
- We took several **behind-the-scenes tours at the amazing Memphis Zoo** (come check it out, we have pandas!),

including feeding hippos with Kris & Brad and Paul & Katie and going eye-to-eye with the giraffes with Betsy & Jason

- **We finally crossed the river and explored Arkansas** on several trips, including celebrating our first anniversary at Hot Springs NP, camping/hiking at Mount Nebo, Petit Jean, and Mount Magazine state parks, and a week hiking in the Ozarks with Kris & Brad for New Year's 2020-21



Strange geology abounds in Arkansas: Big Bluff (feat. Kris & Brad)

- The traditional **Labor Day event with VT friends** went out with a bang in 2019 as our gracious hosts finally sold the amazing Johnson City TN lake house. Eight years of fond memories... and an opportunity to start new traditions?
- **2019 Holidays** saw us in NC again, visiting family in Greensboro & Raleigh, with a scenic stop in Great Smokies NP (interrupted by a 2-hour traffic jam) on the return
- We had some **timely pre-pandemic visitors to Memphis**, including stops at the Botanic Garden with Thomas, Courtney, and Lily in February 2020 and the Civil Rights Museum with Kevin and Mallory in March
- Our traditional **July 4 beach trips to NC** continued into the pandemic, becoming a single-day 14-hour drive (!) in 2020 to visit Jill & Larry. 2021's relative normalcy allowed us to add in a visit with Julia's paternal family (John, Sonja, Martha, Rick, Ricky, Samantha, Stephanie, Eric, and Mark) during their vacation just down the coast. Another 2021 highlight: Richard's dinners, particularly the seafood boil!
- Our **Labor Day 2020 road trip** started with sharing a cabin near Blacksburg and hiking with Brad & Elaine, capped off by a lovely visit with Christina & Jim. We headed north to Alexandria with Julia's family, visited DC friends at Laura & DJ's wedding, and hit up Peter's favorite VA hikes of Old Rag in Shenandoah and Devil's Marblyard near Natural Bridge



Elaine & Julia on the lookout at Hanging Rock Raptor Observatory

- We returned to NC for **Thanksgiving 2020**, visiting Julia's family plus a meetup with Susan, Cary, Charlotte, & Jack. We stopped over in Asheville on our return leg, with time for hiking at Mount Mitchell and browsing the Folk Art Center
- **A kitten found its way into our crawlspace** and got stuck in a cinderblock; Julia liberated her after we heard her adorable mews coming through the floor during dinner. She was super adorable but has a good home elsewhere now
- **Memphis had a 12-day streak of sub-freezing temperatures** plus an uncommon 8" of snowfall in February 2021. Great for sledding but caused us some stress when our sewer drain line froze solid! Collin C joined us for dinner on his way through town; shoutout to him for agreeing to a socially distanced, outdoor meal of ribs when it was 24°F outside!
- **We volunteered at the largest local COVID vaccination site** in Feb-Mar 2021. Peter wound up getting a mild breakthrough case of Delta anyway in July but fortunately Julia escaped unscathed thanks to a rigorous quarantine
- **DC was our destination for Labor Day 2021**, visiting Julia's family in Alexandria after a year apart. We also saw Abby & Chris and met Ezra before meeting up with Kevin, Kathleen, Greg, Liz, Lucas, and Cora in Baltimore – a big thanks to Jeremy for hosting the gang!
- **We celebrated a museum opening** with Julia's extended cousin Jon through his foundation in December 2021 – check out the Savoy Automobile Museum (or his other excellent museums) if you're ever in Cartersville, GA!
- **Extreme weather visited our neighborhood** in winter 2021-22: a windstorm in December felled many trees, destroying a neighbor's bedroom and taking out a block of utility poles, leaving us without power for 3+ days. Not to be outdone, a half inch of ice in February knocked out power to half of the city; it took 120 hours for ours to be restored. Suffice to say we're researching our options for generators this month!

Farewell and Thanks!

Congratulations! You've made it to the end of the newsletter!

For those of you who are new to the distribution list: welcome, and thanks for sticking with us through the end.

For those of you who've been on our mailing list in the past: thank you for your patience and understanding with the extreme intermittent-ness of this edition... although technically we warned you right in the name of the newsletter. We also appreciated the "reminders" and "encouragement" from those who reached out to check in on us, particularly those who generously offered to blame the missing edition on our getting settled in the new house (2019), postal service issues (2020), the Ever Given (2021), and/or the supply chain (2022).

To everybody reading this: we treasure your friendship and your involvement in our lives, and we hope to see more of you in 2022. Have a great year!