

Merry Christmas dear friends and family!

2019 saw the two of us closing the book on our Michigan adventure, and starting up a new one in North Carolina. We will dearly miss the community we made during our brief time in the great north, but we hope that the mild winters of NC and amazing company will be alluring to them during the deep chill of a Michigan winter. Restarting in North Carolina has been very enjoyable so far (loving the hills out here, mild temperatures and many hiking opportunities), though the hardest question is quickly becoming "where are you from?". As silly as it may seem, I feel like the more we have explored and come to appreciate this vast country the harder it is to claim just one place.

In very exciting news, Lauren finished 22th grade (aka grad school) and then after cleaning up some loose ends she successfully defended her thesis the first week of August! "Proud" only begins to describe my feelings. Lauren worked her butt off not only through all four years but also during a crazy period which lasted from January to early March which saw her teaching, working on her dissertation, and applying and subsequently traveling to Oregon, Virginia, California, North Carolina for on-campus interviews. North Carolina's Elon University ended up winning out, and Lauren started as an Assistant Professor the week after her defense. Suffice it to say, she is happy that the semester has finished up and she gets a much deserved opportunity to breathe and collect herself after what has felt like a non-stop year.

This year also saw Lauren bravely saying goodbye to her trusty Camry, Jack (who saw his share of adventure transporting her from her undergrad at Pepperdine across many state lines to the end of her doctorate at MSU). We are grateful that former coworker and dear friend (Jeremy) agreed to welcome Jack into his family, even when it feels like we left a piece of ourselves behind.

I am excited to share that I was able to convince another company in a new industry that I was worth giving a shot. In October I joined Cone Health's Enterprise Analytics team as a Data Analytics Consultant where I have the opportunity to work with leaders throughout Cone, helping them to discover data driven solutions to their vexing problems. I am lucky to have a very welcoming team and I am already loving the highly local nature of this work (we serve Guilford county and roughly a county in each direction). I am continuing to play Ultimate frisbee and I am happy to report that this community continues to be welcoming and goofy even to strangers from Michigan.

Sandwiched among the new jobs and moving, Lauren and I had the opportunity to revisit some of the cities we have grown to love: Louisville, NOLA, Portland. Each of them filled with great food, drink and outdoor adventures (we got to do a kayaking bayou tour during this trip to NOLA). We also had the opportunity to celebrate the wedding of three dear sets of friends in Richmond, Ventura and Sanger (in spirit).

I think Lauren is bummed she didn't get to read as much as she wanted this year (it like she was spending all of her time working on dissertation, classes, etc), though take that with a grain of salt because she still finished 37 books this year. Two that stuck out were *Becoming* by Michelle Obama and *Katrina* by Gary Rivlin. Michelle (is book form) was so kind to keep Lauren company as she criss-crossed across the US during her interviews and "Katrina" provided wonderful insight to the ever vibrant city and people of New Orleans. This year, I went on a Micheal Lewis kick, reading four of his books in quick succession and while I've really enjoyed them, the end of the year has brought a podcast (Dolly Parton's America) and a book (*What You Are Getting Wrong About Appalachia*) which have paired together with our move have challenged me to have a nuanced and complex view of our new home (a region which admittedly I knew only the stereotypes).

Much Love,  
Phil and Lauren

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