

I truly cannot believe another year has passed us by. Last year was a bit crazy and hence the reason half of my Christmas cards sat unfinished. I apologize if it has been a while since you heard from us. Please allow me to share a few updates on our little family.

### ***Our Family***

Our kids are growing so fast. They are each so wonderful and so different. I can best describe their differences in the context of a hike. Tyler rushes off feeling the pull of the path and the mysteries that linger around each bend. He might spy a stick, a rock, a flower, or other natural wonder and then want to take it with him to collect or to use as a prop in play in which he is engaging. Quinn journeys at a much slower pace spying each natural treasure one next to the other. She will stop to inspect, touch, smell, and taste each one and then pick it up and add it gingerly to her collection. Where Tyler will slow to step carefully when encountering precarious places, Quinn takes no precautions confidently climbing to her destinations certain that the rocks, logs and ground on which she travels will not let her fall. She is an excellent climber, but sometimes goes a little too far and tempts fate.

The children's personalities are a wonderful blend. His larger-than-lifeness and energy are matched by her assertiveness and determination. There are many sweet moments that put such a smile on my face. My biggest joys are seeing them walk side by side on hikes, observing Tyler switch to "big brother protective mode" when he thinks Quinn might be in danger, and watching them exchange goodnight kisses and hugs. We have the typical toy and other sibling squabbles, but generally, they enjoy each other's company and have a good time making mischief together. :-p

### **Tyler**

Our gregarious, incredibly outgoing, sweet little boy is three years old now. Tyler talks a ton and loves to spin a yarn for a friendly ear. This year he pretty much taught himself to blow bubbles in the pool, breath under water and swim a small distance on his own. He loves his trike and rides it everywhere we go. He will be rocketing down the sidewalk and then screech to halt to collect a pecan, throw it in the bucket on the back of his bike and take off again. He is also quite the helper in the kitchen. These days he loves making pie crusts – cutting the butter with the pastry cutter, rolling out the crust, and later poking it with a fork in the pie pan. Of course, we pause so he can use his knife to make windshield wipers clearing the flour off the counter and then we are back on the path of making our pie!

### **Quinn**

Our 18 month-old little girl is coming into her own. She is a very jubilant, silly and feisty child. She is very sure-footed and will follow right behind Tyler at the playground climbing up equipment and many times not even needing my assistance. She is determined, focused and quite stubborn, much like her Daddy..ahem! ☺ As tough as she is, she is also quite sensitive and when she gets hurt or something doesn't go her way, she is incredulous as to why that person or object would be hurtful or would not go along with her will. Her vocabulary is very rich and we have big brother to thank for modeling useful words for her. She walks all over the place and loves the outdoors asking to do "outside" all the time. These days I feel as if I have twins because whatever every big brother is doing, she wants to do as well. Some days, it is big brother wanting to do was Quinn is doing! ☺ He is definitely her favorite person to the point where she gets very upset if we go anywhere without him.

### ***Stay at Home Mom-Land***

The farther I venture into this parenting journey, the more I understand that every age will pose questions and challenges for which I will have no immediate answers. I am trying to get more comfortable with that. Only recently, after almost a year and a half being home with my kids, do I feel confident in my ability to handle the curve balls that fly at me on a daily basis. That isn't to say that mistakes aren't made, often. From mistakes comes lessons and from lessons comes growth, and there will always be more opportunities to practice. I keep that in mind on the rough days.

I never realized how parenthood would force me to address my own shortcomings. After years of being able skirt around them, I have to tackle them head-on to be the best parent I can be. That is one fantastic "side-effect" to parenting: everyday I become a better person.

The kids and I have a fabulous routine in place these days which allows us some time to complete chores, a ton of outdoor time, and pauses for us all to have some "rest our body" time. The kids and I hike at least once a week. Since becoming a Mom, I have become even more appreciative of nature. It is here where my kids are most content exploring this world, throwing rocks, finding sticks, noticing flowers and finding unexpected treasures. For Mama, it is a

wonderful recharge where I can breathe in the day and the goodness around me. It is a place where I can just “be” - observing my amazing children and feeling so blessed to have this opportunity to stay at home.

I am crafting like crazy again after a friend opened Pandora’s box. I am now creating a farm rug for Tyler, knitting farm buildings and animals to go with it, knitting a hat for me and a baby sweater. What a joy to awaken old hobbies and share these creative arts with the kids as they watch me turn materials into toys and other fun creations.

### ***Family Adventures***

We are blessed with two kids who love the outdoors and adventures as much as we do. We have spent the past year on numerous hikes, walks, and even managed to do a couple of overnight camping trips. Some of our more notable journeys this year were heading to Steamboat Springs for my cousin’s wedding and taking the kids back to Port Aransas for some time at the beach.

The trip to Steamboat Springs, Colorado was the kids’ first plane trip. The flight was two hours and the kids did great and loved it! We were actually more concerned about our squirmy one year-old and in fact, for most of the return flight, she stood and played quite happily in my seat while I stood in the aisle next to her (we were in the last row). We stayed with my folks in a fantastic condo that overlooked the mountains and ski village. While we didn’t get to do as much hiking as would we have liked, we did enjoy our time up in the mountains, exploring the town of Steamboat, and visiting with family at the festivities.

This was our second annual trip to Port Aransas and the kids again had a great time. Tyler had a blast on the beach and was even more confident about the ocean heading far out with his Daddy on many occasions to “jump” waves. Quinn turned out to be a downright ocean bug! She was not so crazy about swimming pools this summer, but she and the ocean got along famously! There were a few times where she was sitting on the beach and a high tide would knock her over and cover her face with water. She would get back up, shed not one tear, and head back into the water. And if I was sitting on the sand she would come over and say “Mama” with her hand outstretched. I would take her hand and she would pull me out to the water. She loved every moment as did we! This may have to become a bi-annual trip!

### ***Bringing Home the Bacon (an update from Chris)***

At the end of last year, I had moved to a management role at Dell, thinking it would provide a fresh set of challenges and better environment. The decision turned out to be a great one, as I’ve had a fantastic year! The work load is more balanced, I work and joke with many of my friends throughout the day, and continually learn tons from my director. The role continues to be challenging, as I’ve expanded the scope and size of my team while also leading my own projects on the side.

### ***Alpha Dog Photography***

With the support of the wife and kids, I’ve focused more on photography this year. We’ve taken tons of hiking adventures, gone to festivals, and played at parks... all with camera in tow! The highlight of the year though, was my own trip to Montana and Yellowstone National Park as part of a guided photo trek. Montana was simply amazing. I flew into West Yellowstone airport – coming in over rolling hills of pine trees that gave way to a tiny airstrip only at the last moment. “Baggage claim” was a rack at the front door of the airport where bags were dropped off the back of a tractor. Weather was perfectly crisp and cool the whole time.

The trek itself was a blast. We had three phenomenal professional photographers as mentors who provided encouragement and advice, while also giving critical reviews of our work at the end of the day. The shoots were four LONG days – two in Yellowstone, one at a working ranch, and one at a preserved gold rush town. Yellowstone was an incredible park, at least from the tiny little bit we got to see – from dramatic geysers and colorful pools of thermal and sulfur infused water to tons of wildlife (including a bald eagle and a herd of about 30 bison that crossed the road not 15 feet from where we were shooting pictures) everywhere. I’d love to go back someday on my own and spend about a month there, exploring more thoroughly.

### ***This Coming Year***

As the kids get older, our life will cease to be as simple and we will have less time with them. There are no big decisions that have to be made this year, so we plan to spend it playing in nature’s playground as much as possible and enjoying the freedom to follow our whims wherever they may take us.

We are blessed and so content with our lives. This is a good place. It is in the little moments: rolling around in the bed with the kids making a tent out of the sheets, watching Tyler and Quinn hike together, or sitting on the grass at the new city park watching the kids frolic in the water that we know, really, it doesn’t get better than this.

For more regular updates, visit Alyssa’s blog at [www.hedgefamily.net](http://www.hedgefamily.net)

For Chris’ photography gallery and to purchase his work, [www.alphadogphotography.com](http://www.alphadogphotography.com)

For Chris’ views on the kids, life and updates on his photography, [www.alphadogphotography.com/blog](http://www.alphadogphotography.com/blog)