

## *Merry Christmas from Carlos and Mike*



Where DOES the time go??

Happy Holidays to you all. I hope 2015 proved to be a memorable year for you. It was for us, in several ways...mostly good, but out of 365 days, there's bound to be a glitch from time to time.

Carlos and I traveled east in January to be with our grandson, Troy, for his first birthday. We decided to take the train this time rather than fly. We boarded Amtrak train #4 in Los Angeles on a Thursday, arrived in Chicago the following Saturday, the train #30 took us to Washington D. C., arriving Sunday afternoon. We have an interesting country in the winter...something I was not used to seeing (gees, there was a lot of snow) and Carlos says New Mexico was the biggest state ever! It seemed like we would never get out of NM!



Train travel is something else. There were times I swore we'd never get out alive, with the speeds and the curves and the stops...and sleeping on a train traveling 100 MPH is something you must experience at least once in your lifetime.

We spent until Thursday in Maryland where Scott and Sonja live. Troy turned one on January 14, and honestly, I don't think I'd have passed up that moment to be with him on his first birthday. I was with all my grandchildren on their first birthdays, and I wasn't about to let distance keep me from Troy's.

While there, we visited Andrew's Air Force Base where Sonja works. We were able to see one of the Air Force One planes...a 737...but at Sonja's request, did not post pictures of it on social media.

The visit came to an end quickly, and we flew home on Thursday. We are planning to go back when we can.

In February I decided to upgrade the house a little; our bathroom of 60 years desperately needed upgrading to 2015, so I decided to remove the tub and install a bigger shower in it's place.

Then I thought, OK, the counter needs replacing, the wallpaper needs removing...and before you know it, I have a new bathroom that I am enjoying.

The walk-in shower is so much easier on me with my infirmities. The old shower was way too small and the bathtub was next to impossible to climb into.

I don't know what a "no tub" bathroom will do to the resale of the house, but as long as I am here, I will enjoy it. And really...isn't that what counts??



Scott and Sonja are enjoying their life in Maryland even with all the snow. Their home in Mechanicsville, MD is about a 45 minute drive from Sonja's work. They are wonderful parents to a wonderful little boy. Scott is now 37 and stays at home with Troy.

He recently has picked up where he and I left off years ago making chocolates. He's remarkable at it and some of the flavors he comes up with amaze me. I don't do much cooking right now so I'm glad to see that the Dardenelle tradition has continued.

He and I used to hand dip chocolates every holiday season so he's just taking up the slack where Dad left off.

Kate, who is now 36, is still working for Los Angeles County, and has been there for about 10 years.

Her oldest, Kristina ("Kristy" as I call her) is 17...I have NO idea how that happened...and so so pretty. She is in her senior year in high school and doing well. I don't see her much because of time constraints and distance but when we do see each other, we pick up where we left off.

I'm far too young to have grandchildren!

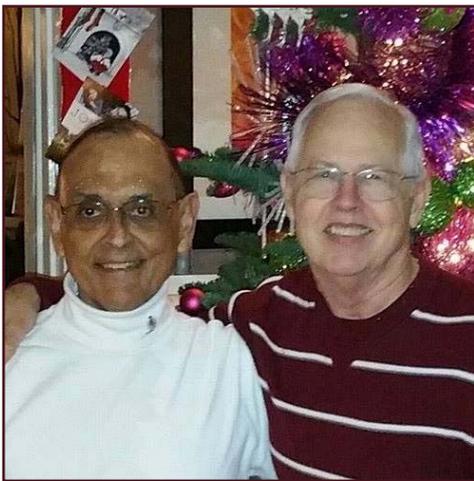


My other granddaughter, Julie, turned 5 in October. Kate had a party over at my house for her and the place rang with children laughing, screaming, etc...you know the drill...which this house hasn't seen in quite some time. Julie has the curliest hair you've ever seen so it gets pulled back to reveal her pretty little face.

I had my front and back lawns removed and replaced with artificial turf in July. The drought in California really made us think about the water we've been using. The year prior, I had, if you recall, new lawns put in, only to be ripped to shreds by raccoons. What a waste of \$5,000 between the sod, the water, the raccoon cages...so we decided to have the turf put in.



After I did that, my water bill went from over \$200 to...\$3. Yes. Three dollars!! I stopped watering my yards completely (artificial turf really doesn't require much, you know...) so my electric/water bills went from about \$800 every 2 months (more when Mom was here) to about \$150 every 2 months. Just a slight savings, huh?? The yards are beautiful year round and require very little in the way of care. Wait...not very little...NONE. Me likey. And yes, Irene is still with me, sitting majestically on the driveway.



Carlos and I have been married now for 2 1/2 years (July, 2013) and he is my rock when it comes to...well, just everything.

I had pretty extensive back surgery in August (re-doing vertebrae T3-T10) and he practically lived at the hospital with me.

It's unfortunate that we have to go through what we do in our lifetimes as far as health, but when we have someone who loves us unconditionally, things are a lot easier to handle.

We flew to Portland in October to see his mom as she had taken a turn for the worse. She was 93 and we felt her time was nearing, so we made the trip kind of unexpectedly. We arrived around 3:00 P.M. and we were no sooner on the road to drive 4 hours to Redmond, that we received a call from his sister, also living in Redmond, that his mom had passed away. We were 3 hours away from seeing her for the last time. We decided to keep driving so we could see his sister and help with arrangements. Carlos' mom had lived in Oregon for a few years since leaving southern California and we hadn't seen her since she left. She led a good, long life.





My mom is in hospice care at 94 years old. She has become pretty incapacitated with dementia and as of this writing, is but a very short time away from her passing.

She does not recognize me (the hardest part of all this) and does not communicate but very little...one word at a time. She does not eat or drink much but she is not in any pain and is as comfortable as she can be. That's all I want.

We say we're prepared...but are we?

I've had to recap a full year in just a few minutes typing, but it gives you an idea of what has gone on. My health continues to be stable (even with the back surgeries and still not out of a walker yet...) and as long as I have the love of my family and friends, really, what could be better?

From the warmth of our heart and home to yours, we wish you a beautiful holiday season.

Love,  
Mike and Carlos  
Christmas, 2015

