

Hello to all my friends and family. Unbelievably, this is the eighth time I'm writing to you all for the solstice season. It's become tradition to look back at old letters as I sit down to write. Today is the first large snow storm of the year, but I am warm and comfortable writing at my lovely desk. My Endlers Livebearer fish gave birth just a few days ago, so I am taking frequent breaks to enjoy watching the very cute fry.



I was lucky enough to go on *many* great vacations this year. I'd like to highlight three, starting with the trip to California I took with my good friend Tyler over the labor day holiday. We flew into San Fransisco where we were graciously hosted by Jim and Tracy in their beautiful home. We stopped by Claire's family in Napa and Tyler's home town of San Ramon. We then traveled down Big Sur to a beautiful ocean-side campground near Santa Barbara. We visited Tyler's uncle before heading inland to spend a night among giants in Sequoia National Forest. Finally, we camped for two nights in Death Valley. We had the entire campground to ourselves (see left)! Death Valley was definitely the highlight for me, especially the drive through Titus Canyon and the night sky.

In July my good friends Claire and Ralph Till visited me for a hiking adventure in the Midwest. We drove from Madison to Michigan's upper peninsula, where we spent several days hiking through the Porcupine Mountains Wilderness. It's been years since I've been backpacking, and it was a new experience for Claire and Ralph. The Porcupine Mountains were amazing—very private campsites with long trails and very few people. For hours we hiked along the southern coast of Lake Superior, enjoying the dramatic geometric shapes of the rocky shoreline. Here (right) we three are—tired but happy near the end of our hike.



Near the end of September Kevin and I spent a few days exploring Northern Wisconsin and Minnesota. It ended up being a tour of many waterfalls. We started by camping in Amnicon Falls State Park and visiting Big Manitou Falls (highest in Wisconsin). We then camped in Tettegouche State Park (below), where we had our own small private beach with signature Lake Superior pebbles. We spent several days exploring the northern coast of Lake Superior—full of picturesque waterfalls, dramatic coastlines, and cozy small towns. We'll have to go back soon.



I'm feeling grateful for all the joy I have experienced this year. I continue to learn and grow in my professional life. Congratulations to Kate and Steve on their marriage. Thanks to all who have been great friends, especially Zach, Mark, Darien, Kyle, my Bates Buds, and the Wednesday night game crew.

Wishing you and yours a happy new year. Stay in touch!

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