

Welcome, once again, to the annual Wu update! 2012 has been a good whirlwind for us.

The whirlwind began in January with a ski trip. Dachywan, Conrad & Elizabeth went to Northstar with one of Conrad's friends and his family. We were very lucky: it had been a very dry fall and winter, so many resorts in Tahoe had no snow, but Northstar DID!

In April, Alyssa received her college notification letters. To decide between the 2 colleges Alyssa liked best, 4 of us drove to LA on consecutive weekends so Alyssa could attend open their houses. Decision: UC Irvine where she had been accepted to their honors program, thus giving her closer contact to the professors, guaranteed on-campus housing for 4 years, and priority registration for classes.

In May, the whole family attended Stephen's graduation from Case Western. Yes, he really did get his Bachelor's degree!!! And in chemistry, no less! After graduation, he spent a few more months in Cleveland before coming home at the end of July. Currently, he is working at NASA (about 20 minutes away from home) doing chemistry research, and seems to be enjoying and learning a lot.

We had a small break in June, during which Conrad attended some week long summer camps and Alyssa graduated from high school. Then in July, Elizabeth brought Conrad to Anaheim for his 1st national fencing tournament. He was the youngest in his group, so not surprisingly, he did not win any bouts, but it was good experience. And he enjoyed the camaraderie with his fellow teammates. Then he REALLY enjoyed going to Legoland for the next few days after the tournament where he met up with one of his school buddies, and they both got up the nerve to ride roller coasters for the 1st time!

Mid-July, Elizabeth brought Alyssa to UCI for orientation. There, she really got to see more of the campus and figure out her plans for the next 4 years, and she registered for her fall classes.

End of July, Dachywan's mother came to visit from Taiwan. We took her on a weekend trip to Napa Valley where we visited Castello di Amarosa, a re-creation of a European castle, a geyser, and 2 fancy restaurants where we had excellent dinners and wine! A few days afterwards, Dachywan accompanied his mother back to Taiwan where he stayed for about a week.

Also in July, Elizabeth's sister, Judy, came from Switzerland with her family to visit after being away for 3 years! Although Conrad was the only who got to see them in July, the rest of us got to see her in August when Elizabeth, Stephen, Alyssa & Conrad went to Orlando, FL with them. We spent 10 swift days there, hitting a theme park EVERY DAY!! We spent the 1st day at Discovery Cove, a wonderful place where we could snorkel among Manta rays and tropical fish, and Alyssa & Conrad swam with dolphins. The next 4 days we spent @ Disneyworld, and then one day @ Aquatica, a water park with the BEST lazy river (you drift by a huge tank where you can see dolphins playing) then the next 2 days at Harry Potter World and the final day at Universal Studios (which was quite different from its counterpart in LA). Harry Potter World was really detailed: from Moaning Myrtle in the bathrooms to the screaming baby Mandrakes! And although Butterbeer wasn't that good, the Pumpkin Fizz sure was! And the Forbidden Journey ride was truly forbidding, but AWESOME!

We had a complete change of pace the 1st week of September when we FINALLY got to take our 1st whole family vacation this year. We went to Yosemite so Alyssa could achieve her goal of climbing Half Dome before college. While Dachywan, Elizabeth & Conrad biked on the valley floor, Alyssa & Stephen, led by a paid guide, made the 8 hour hike to the top of Half Dome and back. They swore off hiking anymore after that! Good thing we stayed at Housekeeping Camp inside Yosemite. It was luxury camping, just a 5 minutes' walk from the Merced River where we ended up spending most of our time, wading in the glacier water, fishing (none caught), skipping stones, and catching crayfish.

In November, Conrad went to his first out of state fencing competition. He and Elizabeth went to Chandler, AZ, for a weekend where he competed against other ≤10 year old boys. Although at 8, he was the youngest competitor, he didn't come in last! And he had a lot of fun with all his teammates, on & off the fencing strip, and ate rattlesnake for the 1st time!

Then our 3rd family outing was driving Alyssa to UC Irvine at the end of September. We moved her things from home, bought many more while there, then drove back 2 days later. Parting was bittersweet, but Alyssa seems to have adjusted fairly well. She is majoring in economics, and thinking to minor in environmental studies. She made many friends, 7 of whom drove with her back to Saratoga right after finals to spend 2 nights at our house and go sightseeing nearby during the day. It's nice to have the family all together again!

In that spirit, we wish you a 2013 filled with fun family times and a very Merry Christmas!

From the Wu Family

