THE 2022 MISTLETOE MISSIVE

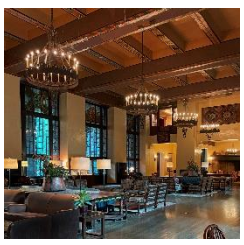
"All the news that fits!" - Enlightening You Since 1993

Friends, relatives, countrymen, lend me your eyes: I come to report on 2022, not to bury it! The subject year is nearly completed, another 365.256 day trip around the sun, that's 584,000,000 miles… wish we could get frequent flyer miles for ***that*** trip. Trip? Did someone say "trip?" Hold on, that's not how we do it here! Chronological order, sorta, mostly. Settle in, get your beverage of choice and snuggle into your favorite chair… Let's review 2022!

January? Cold, snow, yuck! Moving on… in February we headed out to Des Moines, Iowa, for the annual Cardinal & Gold Gala benefitting the first-time students' scholarship fund at Iowa State University. Having been a first-generation college student in my family, this event holds a special place for me. I have hosted a table the last several years, getting (*most of… Dave?*) my old roommates from ISU to "fill seats" and generally just having a *blast!* After the gala, we went back into "hibernation" until spring. No record-breaking floods to report, just a slo-o-o-o-w warm-up to summer.

Speaking of summer, we started traveling more in 2022. Our first "sleep-away" trip was a long weekend trip in June to Detroit for the Motor Muster at The Henry Ford (museum) and Greenfield Village. A vintage car show combined with a festival. Some *great cars* and beautiful weather. On the way home we also got a quick side trip to a large, multi-building, multi-acre car museum, the Gilmore Car Museum, Hickory Corners, Michigan… even more cars than at the muster!

Now that we were warmed up, in July we took our extended summer trip. We continued last year's "National Park Theme" (last year we went to Glacier N.P., remember?) This trip included not one, but THREE national parks! Dick & I flew out to Fresno, "Raisin Capital of the World" where we started our circuitous park tour. First up was Sequoia National Park, home of General Sherman, the largest (by volume) tree in the world. Did you know they estimate "him" to be 2,200 – 2,700 years old! We spent the night in Sequoia, fortunately in a hotel room, because if we had had to spend it in the car we would have been awakened during the night when A BEAR tried to claw his/her way into the car trunk. Hey, it was a rental, not our problem! The next park is immediately adjacent to Sequoia (and funny, still about 2 hours away by car), Kings Canyon National Park. More beautiful scenery and even <u>more</u> giant sequoias and redwoods. We left King's canyon for a day's drive up to the centerpiece of our trip, Yosemite N.P.! There had been fires earlier in the





week so the crowds one would normally expect were virtually non-existent. And like the crowds, the smoke in Yosemite Valley was also non-existent, unlike Glacier last year! Yosemite is breathtakingly beautiful, if it's not on your "bucket list" it *should be!* We stayed at the Ahwahnee Lodge for 3 glorious days. But it was time to move our adventures towards the coast, so we headed to Modesto to catch Amtrak to San Francisco, the final stop of this trip. We did touristy things: saw the Golden Gate Bridge (again), the "Seven Sisters" (famous Victorian houses in S.F. (again)), a day trip to the Oakland side of the bay to see John Muir's house (1st time), also on the Oakland side, the USS Hornet aircraft carrier museum (1st time), and the highlight of the trip, for me, we visited and had supper with my





late dad's older brother, Uncle Bob. We also had the pleasure to meet Uncle Bob's granddaughter, Janet Smith, if that is her real name… (inside joke!) We had a great visit and had a chance to look over a bunch of *really old* photos my dad took when he was just 12 years old, talk about "way-back-machine"!

Side note: Just one day before our trip out west we received word of the expansion of the Davidson/Van Hoeck family. Our nephew Ryan and his wife Lindsey had their first child, Ford Van Hoeck. (Ryan is Dick's sister Dee Ann and brother-in-law Jim Van Hoeck's oldest son… for those that need a score card to keep track!) ***WOO-who!*** And not to be out done, later in the summer Kyle, Ryan's younger brother (check your score cards!) made the announcement that he and his girlfriend Emily were engaged! Look for the wedding report in next year's letter!


Back in Iowa, we tended to the property, lawn care, gardening, and this year's project… installing vintage-looking yard lights (again). Short version, these lights were in our front yard, but we replaced them years ago and since then they have been moldering out back by the carriage house waiting to be repurposed and it *finally* happened. I spent several days scraping, sanding, cleaning, and repainting them. Then Dick and I dug holes and poured concrete bases for them and Dick wired them into the house, viola! Easy-peasy! And with that we "earned" another weekend trip.

Over the Labor Day weekend we jetted out to Albuquerque, NM, then drove 2+ hours north to Chama, NM, to ride the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic railroad. The landscape was gorgeous, and the locals all commented on how much rain they had been having as everything was GREEN; not what I expected from New Mexico in late summer, not even northern NM!

After a pleasant if not somewhat dry summer in Iowa, fall rolled around and the leaves began falling, and falling… AND ***falling***! For any of you readers who have not been here, we have trees, and *more* trees. Fall clean-up at 1802 East River Drive entails "vacuuming" up the leaves with our indispensable John Deere lawn tractor. I could not tell you how many carts of leaves were mulched & sucked up this year, but I did count the number of times I loaded the pickup truck and hauled them to the compost facility… ***FIFTEEN*** loads! (Note: this picture is ONLY one third of the total haul!) I would hate to even guess how many bags that would be but suffice it to say I was glad when I was done.

There was ONE MORE trip left in the year. This ***extra special*** trip was in the works for 7 years! I had promised my mother for her "39th" birthday (…her 36th one, but you didn't hear from me!) I would take her any where she wanted to go. She thought about it for a while, then there was her skin cancer surgery, then there was COVID, etc., etc. Finally, we pulled the trigger in late October and squeezed it in… we were headed to the ***Grand Canyon***, the fourth national park this year! Well, for me anyway; this was just a mother-son trip as I ventured off leaving Dick at home (spoiler – he survived, no worries, he knows how to order pizza!)

We flew off for Phoenix and drove up to Williams, AZ, the gateway to the Grand Canyon. From Williams we took the Grand Canyon Railway into the park, and I do mean into the park. The train drops you off at the foot of the hill where most of the lodges in the park are located. Up the hill and… there it is, the largest canyon on the face of the Earth! I have included a picture, but as *everyone says*, pictures cannot do it justice. Another amazing park, we are so lucky to have such a wonderful National Park System, get out there and enjoy the parks. While there, our big adventure was the mule ride along the canyon rim. It was two hours in the saddle and that was fine, but neither of us wanted anymore, considering what happened! "WHAT happened?!?" you say. If you didn't know, mules are skittish and are easily startled. Well, we were on the ride and had stopped at our first viewpoint, all lined up with our mules facing the canyon mere feet from the rim, when what should happen but a mountain goat came shooting over the rim, scattering rocks and startled the mules, who I remind you were facing the canyon, mere feet away, and they BOLTED! Okay, truth be told, by feet I mean like thirty, and as the wrangler/guide had already told us, every mule's number one concern is *self-preservation*, they did BOLT, but they did so while turning AWAY from the canyon. We did have to rein them in, and only the four end most (out of ten) mules took off, which included both Mother & me. The guide was truly impressed on how well everyone handled it, and even took a picture to show his boss the "arrangement" of the troop (which was scattered!) after we had been all lined up, did I mention we were mere feet from the rim? Anyway, the rest the ride was low-key compared to that, and was absolutely worth it, even Mother said it was great (although she walked kinda funny for a couple days afterwards… think Festus on *Gunsmoke*, ha! Kidding… sorta!)

The rest of the trip was spent driving from Arizona down to Las Cruces, NM, to visit my brother Bob and his wife Sharon, their chickens, dog & cat, oh my! We were there for 2 days during which we got to see my niece Melissa.

Both of Bob's daughters live 40 miles away in El Paso, TX, but unfortunately Crystal was under the weather and didn't want to take the chance of making her grandmother sick (and *presumably* **also** her uncle!) That was appreciated. We returned home, safe AND healthy!

As the year drew to a close, we spent Thanksgiving with Dick's parents at his aunt & uncle's in Manchester, IA. We squeezed one more quick trip in to Chicago for a show and some shopping with friends Tom & Ken. The decorations are up, and… ***The Letter*** is complete!

Wishing everyone a very Merry Christmas and a happy & healthy 2023! Cheers!

Mark & Dick