



So here's what we've learned this year.

Paddleboats are not cool. Or forty-nine year-olds in paddleboats are not cool. Especially forty-nine year-olds who go to check out the 4th of July action taking place at the sandbar and find themselves paddling alone among a group of 500 or so hard-partying twenty-somethings looking down from their \$50,000 wakeboats with a "what are you doing here, old man" look. And there is no good answer when they actually verbalize the question ("Just looking" all of a sudden sounds kind of creepy). So you just paddle harder. No, paddleboats are not cool.

Our kids think they are very cool. When Chris told Jefferson to come to dinner and he said, "Just a sec," Chris responded, "No, no secs." Oh, you should've heard the guffaws and snickering. We're clearly in the middle stage of child-rearing. First stage, that goes right over their heads. Middle stage, they "get" it. Third stage? We're serious - no secs!

Hannah better study hard or marry well. She had her first baby-sitting job and promptly used her first paycheck to hire Jefferson to be her personal servant. No iTunes downloads, no trip to the mall for this girl. Nope, twenty-five bucks in lifetime earnings and she's hiring a butler.

Jefferson is living a secret life. While fishing in Mayfield, KY (pop. 8), we were invited to the Easter play at our plant manager's church. Two-and-a-half hours later, the pastor asks the cast of hundreds and audience of thousands (where they came from, I do not know - a loaves and fishes moment, to be sure) to bow their heads and raise their hands if they feel they've been saved by Jesus. Afterwards, Jefferson says that was the one part he didn't understand. After I explain, he says he should've raised his hand, "because I've probably been saved by Jesus a couple of times." I'm sure you have.

The "Kiss-Cam" is no such thing. Chris and I ended up on the scoreboard during the Kiss-Cam segment while sitting behind the Reds' dugout. They cut to another couple, then came right back to us. Wow, we must be good, I thought - until security ran over in mid-kiss and told me to get my beer off the dugout. Kiss-Cam, my ass. It's a sting operation ("Camera 3, distract the suspects in Row One, Unit 2 move in, call for backup, if necessary").

There IS an app for that. Two dogs go running through the yard. The kids try calling them. The dogs don't respond. Jefferson yells, "My iTouch!" and goes running into the house (I am confused at this point, as would any rational human being). But wait! He's downloaded a Dog Whistle app (using his Butler earnings, I assume). Unfortunately, the dogs are not impressed. But, it's still better than the Death App - the all too depressing one that counts down how many seconds there are until you die (though, eleven seconds would have seemed far too long when I was in that damn paddleboat).

Hannah's been there, done that. Hannah's teacher gave each of her students a note predicting what their futures held. She saw some as Hollywood stars or successful doctors, athletes or musicians. Hannah was not pleased with her destiny: "Hannah, with your ability to get people to do things your way - and like it - I'm sure whatever organization you run will be wildly successful." How boring, she thought. Yeah, where's the challenge in that, huh, Hannah, Ruler of the Universe?

We are blessed. Someone once said you are blessed when you have friends who feel comfortable enough to go into your cabinets and drawers without asking. Boy, are we blessed. Seriously. Folks are fortunate if there are people they look forward to having over for dinner or vacationing with. But they are blessed if there are people who are there when they need them. We learned that when we lost Chris's brother, Matt, unexpectedly this summer. People who provided the meal at the funeral. People who traveled hundreds of miles to pay their respects. People who shared personal stories about how Matt had touched them. You know who you are, but I don't think you know how much each of you meant to us. It's just a hard way to learn how lucky we are. Next time, we'd prefer it if you just went through our drawers. And if you catch us smiling when you do, you'll understand why.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year, Everyone



923 photos taken in 2009 and just one with the whole family. Here it is. Traveling in style to see the Reds.