

So, when we left you last year, Lauren had just become engaged, Cheryl, Ryan and Lauren were all working at United Airlines and I was coming out of a difficult year with my job. This year was a very busy one but it was filled with lots of really happy times and a few significant changes.

Obviously the big event was Laurens wedding on August 17th. Lots of planning by Lauren and Cheryl and huge amounts of work putting décor and other bits together but it all came together in a beautiful day that was filled with love and happiness. It all went off without a hitch. We were delighted to have our niece, Karen, and her husband Darren from South Africa and his parents from UK with us and also one of Laurens kindergarten school friends, Rafe, from UK. And again, our good friends from Atlanta, James and Sharon and children celebrated with us. The wedding service was given by a pastor who was a pastoral intern with Lauren several years ago so was very personal.

After the wedding we took a Texas road trip to show some of the guests the highlights of Dallas, Austin and San Antonio that also gave Cheryl and I some downtime. We have also enjoyed getting to know Donovan's extended family (and it is extensive!) as many of them live close to us Lauren and Donovan are living in an apartment not too far from us. Donovan has recently branched out into his own business as a personal trainer while continuing his studies. Lauren is very busy at work having been promoted to a manager position in the payroll department. She works very long hours due to the consolidation of the payrolls for the two airlines but at least they have now given her a laptop so she doesn't have to stay at the office until very late.

Cheryl has continued her steady progress at United. She manages a group of recruiters and spends quite a bit of time in Chicago and other stations. She has recently been recruiting pilots and has found it very interesting. She doesn't have a much downtime as she works a lot in the evenings and weekends at home but she has hooked up with a few local "girls" and goes to social functions and the theater with them.

Ryan and Meredith took another big step middle of the year when they decided to buy their own house. They have bought a place about 45 minutes from us south of the city. Meredith is still teaching a group of gifted pupils at the same school and seems to be very happy. Ryan is doing very well at United. He has been working on their "app" for the iPhone and developed some part of it that United thought was so important that they are patenting it. Although he won't get anything for it, there will still be significant bragging rights to be quoted as one of the developers! He continues to do some game development work on a contract basis for his former employers. He and Mer are taking a trip to Europe starting on Christmas Day.

My difficulties with mcaConnect continued into the new year and it became clear by the middle of the year that it was not something I could continue so I "semi-retired" end of July and concentrated my efforts on the restaurant. That has been a very good thing as since then we have seen growth rates over last year as high as 32% some months. We should break even in December and hopefully get to a sustainable profit by middle of next year. I have also been President of our Lions Club this year and continue to manage the community events in the park. I also started volunteering with a local light opera group assisting with their Front of House operation. All of those things keep me very busy!

Our travel was restricted this year due to the wedding but we did pop across to London for a few days in May as we had our niece from Pretoria and our nephew from Cape Town there at the same time. Stayed at a hotel just across from the London Eye and did a lot of walking around the City and also a day trip out to Windsor.

So that was our year. To end on a slightly philosophical note I had the opportunity to toast Lauren at their wedding and while preparing for that was struck by just how much she has accomplished and also what a strong and loving team she and Ryan have been over the years. He has been the true big brother. They have both become amazing young people with good jobs, strong work ethics and have chosen wonderful partners. Cheryl and I often comment on just how blessed we have been particularly when we hear of some of the trial and tribulations of friends.

So we hope that you and your family and friends will have a fabulous Christmas and a happy, healthy and wealthy New Year ...