

Liz & Michael

2015 is almost over and it just now feels like things are getting back to normal after many college applications, 2 surgeries and a life milestone.

Hayden has returned from a successful first semester, Michael is riding his mountain bike again and Emma is in the final stages of strengthening her quadriceps. Christmas is right around the corner, and there is snow in the mountains! Yippeee!

Given the circumstances, the 2015 trips had to be a lot more cerebral.

Hayden and I flew out for orientation at Alabama. Hayden was pretty excited about the computer based honors (CBH) program he is in and I saw why on this trip. They have their own lab and really look out for each other. Hanging out in the CBH lab was exciting. So many kids with optimism and interesting outlooks on the future. The energy had me feeling envious.

As Emma mentioned we attended our first Objectivist conference in Charlotte. Something we had wanted to do for years and it didn't disappoint. On a friend's recommendation we visited the NASCAR museum and didn't expect much but everyone had a blast - they really do a good job promoting their sport.

Liz celebrated her 50th birthday with her sisters in Las Vegas. Luckily she returned as promised to celebrate with us.

It was finally time to drop Hayden off at Alabama in mid August. This was painful for us, but he was ready. Then the three of us headed for Southern California to spend some time with family and friends.

Merry Christmas!

Hayden

It's hard to believe how quickly 2015 is drawing to a close. Time seems to be passing so much faster—especially with having made the move to the University of Alabama.

I can't really discuss this past year without discussing college. Much of my time and effort was directed towards the transition from a high school student to a student at a university. I worked hard to earn scholarships and to end my high school career on a high

note. I remember some of my final projects. My favorites were the Hunt The Wumpus coding competition for Computer Science, work with Nand2Tetris, and building artificial muscles. I am especially proud of the latter. I took a novel idea and made some progress through experimentation. I've found that these projects have been especially helpful this year: many of the research projects my colleagues are involved with require varying levels of computer and programming knowledge.

My summer was devoted to preparing for the big move—I packed exactly 7.5 cubic feet. I'm thankful my mom threw me a wonderful graduation party, and I was also able to spend time with my friends. We went on a few hikes, and enjoyed the fire pit I built in our backyard in which we roasted marshmallows.

Moving to the university was a big change, although I feel I adapted well to the new responsibilities. The biggest challenge is using the free time to take advantage of the numerous opportunities available to me on campus.

The primary reason I chose the University of Alabama was the Computer Based Honors Program. This program has had an incredible impact on my experience. We liken it to having an automatic group of friends on campus—everyone is academically driven, smart, and have unique personalities and backgrounds. All the upperclassmen are working on incredible research projects, and I have already made many good friends at the university, and (if the upperclassmen are a good indicator) we will have very strong bonds by the time we graduate.

To give you a sense how unique this community is, there are people here with wackier outside-of-the-box ideas than I have (which is impressive, to say the least), but the atmosphere genuinely convinces you that those ideas, and anything, can happen.

I'm looking forward to returning home and spending the holidays with my family and friends—hopefully mountain biking, hiking, skiing, and enjoying Washington State. It'll be a nice break before I return to have some more adventures next semester.

Happy Holidays!

Emma

2015, just as all the other years, flew by very quickly. Although there were many ups and downs and a lot of change, it was still a memorable experience. I finished up my sophomore year at Redmond High School, taking fun but challenging courses. One of my favorite classes was CSE (Computer Science and Engineering) where I learned a lot about engineering and even constructed a mini quadcopter. It was really cool to find a class that I have an interest in majoring in.

Throughout this whole year, I have also been focusing on recovering from a serious surgery. I suffered a knee injury when I took a hit on the soccer field, and unfortunately still have not returned to soccer. Although this has been a very difficult recovery process, I have been thankful for those who have supported me and I keep looking forward to when I can return.

As I entered my junior year in high school, I spent a lot of time preparing for standardized testing which took up a lot of time, especially during the summer. I am hoping to score high enough for scholarships so it took a lot of time to study. Besides the academic side of things, over the summer my family and I traveled to North Carolina to attend an objectivist conference. It was based on Ayn Rand's philosophy and we were able to listen to many speeches and learn more about objectivism.

Another major event occurred in August when we dropped my brother, Hayden, off at the University of Alabama. This was a huge change for our family. Although it was scary at first, it was also very exciting to see my brother finally graduate high school and enter his first year at college. Luckily, I was able to experience the "college life" when I took tours at Alabama, UCLA and USC. After dropping my brother off, we visited family in California. It was great to see my cousins, aunts and uncles again. Now, as the year comes to an end, I can look back and appreciate the good times, but also look forward to the experiences and events that will come.

You can always see more at: <http://family.spicysalsa.org>

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