

We will spend a cozy Christmas together in Olympia with all of our children, where we will settle in for a rainy but green Christmas in The Northwest. Then, we load our boots and sleeping bags in the Chevy truck for a trek across the white Cascades and into likely-snowy Northern Idaho to visit Grandpa Bud Boisen's ranch near Hauser Lake, Idaho.

Now 91 years young, Bud still lives in a large rustic cabin warmed by home-grown firewood burning in a pentagon-shaped wood stove. It is all situated on a ranch along icy Hauser Creek near the base of Mount Spokane. He still runs cattle branded with a campfire iron on the ranch, keeps a number of white ponies around for amusement, and remains family famous for his breakfast of huckleberry buckwheat pancakes. The ranch is out of the reach of most cellular towers, nestled in the trees amidst deer, elk, wild turkeys, bobcats, and coyotes. It is also at the bottom of one of the most harrowing sled hills in the Northwest. There's a very old seven-foot strand of C-9 Christmas lights hanging loosely on rusty nails above the front door to mark the season. Inside, on the wood-paneled wall opposite a bear skin, is a Christmas tree that grew up less than 200 yards away. If the snow gets too deep or the mud and manure gets too sloppy, nephew Andy Rohrback neatly shuttles family members between home, barns, corrals, sledding chutes, and fields with a trusty diesel John Deere Gator.

Bud Boisen is just one of the many family blessings we will take with us into the New Year.

Like Santas on street corners, our blessings come in many shapes and forms. Sons Adam and Aaron joined us this fall for the UNLV-WSU football game in Las Vegas. The Cougars won the game but the highlight of the trip was a sunrise visit to our Mirage hotel room by the all-night partying sons. When we responded to the clatter at the front door to see what was the matter, our sons stood offering freshly-poured bloody marys from the new bartender friend, "Omar," and accompanied by a woman identifying herself as "Amber." Adam and Aaron claimed they both had married Amber that night.

A far different blessing for us was that Tiffany graduated with an associate arts degree this year from South Sound Community College. After a number of years coaching and playing in local flat track roller derby, she has hung up her skates for the time being to further her postsecondary education in radiology. Perhaps now her ribs can heal. She lives in East Olympia and has a great new boyfriend.

Cara has gone back to school while maintaining her position at the Fred Hutchison Cancer Research Institute near Lake Union in Seattle. She appears to have her eye on graduate school someday. Regrettably, her boyfriend, Tom, was called to Mississippi for a two-week holiday assignment in the Navy Reserve but that puts him closer to his Carolina family for Christmas.

Adam continues to work in Pullman for the athletic department at Washington State University. His wife, Hannah, is a manager at the South Fork Public House. Adam organized a major family camping trip to Winthrop for Father's Day.

Aaron, who has spent much time on the road at car shows for Air Lift Company, has acquired some Michigan land and is now a sort of single gentleman farmer. He also introduced Robin this year to tapping and distilling maple syrup at a nearby Michigan "sugar bush" near "Vermontville." The syrup from the "sugar shack" tastes mighty good on huckleberry buckwheat pancakes.

Robin has been very busy with work at Providence Mother Joseph Care Center in Olympia. She does come home tired each night but often also has a touching story about a resident she has helped or a family she has assisted. Larry is finishing up his 25th year at Washington State University, currently working with advanced journalism students in the program where he graduated, The Edward R. Murrow College of Communication. He was elected president of the local homeowners association, grappling with politics at its most grassroots level. And yes, he continues his hobby in model trains, building a layout around this year's Christmas tree. He also produced a giant upstairs O-Scale Sounder Train display for the Providence Managers Christmas Party held at the Ganders home this year.

Perhaps best of all, Larry and Robin celebrate their seventh wedding anniversary on New Year's Day. All in all, we count many blessings (and we didn't even mention the outcome of the Apple Cup!)

From our family to yours, we wish you many more blessings for either a white or green Christmas, and the happiest New Year.

Robin & Larry and our schnauzer, Tuney Anderson Ganders

**8625 Fox Ridge Lane SE; Olympia, Washington 98513-5680.
360-459-2084; E-mail: larryandrobin@ganders.net**

To view our family holiday album online, check the family web page and links to Larry Christmas train pages, plus Ganders and Fraunfelder history: <http://www.ganders.net>