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ST.SOME



TIMES

January 2021





Another Very Happy New Year!

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had done them later. Yet, I was heading back to the Maldives capital, which was restricting travel tighter every day. We were to sleep one more night onboard and I had already arranged to be PCR tested onboard.

I spent the 10 hour boat trip buying new tickets from Malé to Chicago, canceling the expensive Hotel in Malé for Jan 2nd, renting a car in Chicago, and verifying this all twice over. Imagine trying to go through all of the steps - with internet going in and out - for buying international tickets across the world when random airports are closed, entire countries are closed, and Covid has a stranglehold on the entire world.

Finally, I had a plan made. No matter what, I was going back to the USA either to see mom in Florida or Erin in Wisconsin. Erin seemed to be in a worse health condition than mom so I opted for the midwest. If I had enough time, I could fly down to Florida and see mom. If her condition got worse, I would make it no matter what.

As I settled my final expenses for the Carpe Diem, I enjoyed a beer with my new friends and prepared for Covid-travel in the morning.



4.5 Hr
Flight



20 Hr
Layover



15 Hr
Flight



The Maldives are on the equator. I had planned only for Maldives when I left. Therefore, I was traveling ultra-light. I had one carryon with fins, a few clothes, and a few vital dive pieces. My shoulder bag had my ever present computer necessities and dive cameras. My clothes consisted of a white t-shirt, jeans, and my Chacos (flip-floppy footwear)

Armed with my PCR test to even get onboard, I flew 4.5 hours to Dubai International Airport (DXB) for a 20 hour layover. I tried to get into the Emirates lounge, but they wanted \$250/hr since I didn't have a business class ticket. Instead, I opted for the \$400/night hotel right in the airport. Was it worth it? Absolutely. Since I was still in the airport, I wouldn't have to pay for or wait for another PCR test to fly. The hours flew by as I ate some horrible McDonald's food and ordered six german Weißen Bieren to wash it down.

The only reason I stayed at the hotel was safety. It is different if there are two of you sleeping in an airport. Even a secure airport like Dubai International. I was alone. Who would wake me up in time for my flight? What if someone sat next to me on one of the relaxing chairs and succeeded in taking my computer bag or something off of me? The hotel was the best choice. I couldn't expect to sleep on the 15 hour flight coming up. The hotel room was definitely worth it. The room was just down the hall in Terminal 1A and my flight was leaving from Terminal 1B. I am very comfortable in this airport.

I was up and out of the hotel room well before my wake up call from the Concierge desk. When I got on the flight, it was only half full. I had an empty seat between myself and the next passenger. But I didn't sleep much. I watched a few movies, walked the aisles every half hour, drank lots of coffee, and nodded off once in a while for an hour or so. The uneventful trip ended in Chicago.

I made it through Customs and into my rental car within 45 minutes. The airport was all but empty. Like Dubai International, a full half of the O'Hare international arrivals area was closed off. I settled into my rental car and left Chicago listening to the second quarter of Packers at Bears. It was an easy decision to pull off the road in Kenosha and get a hotel room. Beer, Pizza, and 2nd half of the Game on TV.

Let me Whine a Bit!

I know it is Covid times and hotel rooms are barren of things other guests might touch. When I ordered my pizza from Domino's, the dumbass didn't know where this hotel is. Ughh. So, he asks me what the address is! Nothing in my room had the address on it. Whatever. I hung up and went all the way downstairs to the front desk. Called Dominoes again. Gave them all the information. 1 1/2 hours later, I got my pizza. What? Even on game day it shouldn't take that long. I don't have ANY expectation of service overseas. I do have an expectation of service in the USA.

I introduce to you, one of the best friends you could
ever be blessed with. Meet **Kappy!**

Man, that PBR sure
does look delicious!
I better get one too.





HAPPY KAPPY!

The first person I called (after family) was Kappy. I arranged to meet him for lunch at noon. First, I had to make a pit stop at a local Walmart and gear up. Driving through frozen Wisconsin, even during the day, in a t-shirt and flip flops without socks is not a good idea.

Unfortunately, I got to Kappy's more like 13:00 rather than noon. I walked right in and felt immediately at home. I got to meet his new puppy ALBANY (named after the sub he served on in the Navy an eon ago), while he finished up some "covid time work from home".

After a little puppy and Kappy time, we headed out for lunch. I cannot tell you how amazing it is to see a friend for just a few minutes and be caught up on 18 months. Really. We had a quick lunch and arranged to meet for dinner later in the week.

I cannot remember the name of the bar, but "it's not where you are or what you do, it's whom you are with that is important" - My Own Quote





Fun Country

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The GB Lemoine Family

After a week of chasing down, testing, and waiting for results, I was Covid free and feeling good enough to see my little brother's family. Erin and Jason had me over one evening and I had a great time just sitting there with the entire family - except for TJ - and five doggies chatting and sharing a few stories, just catching up.

I promised Teddy I would spend some time with him on MineCraft, setting up a server for the two of us and I planned for a day to take the girls out for lunch.

It is always a pleasure to see what Jason and Erin are up to but this time there really isn't anything to share here. Instead, I focused on the kids.

Colin did most of the cooking when I came over in the afternoon or evening. He's focusing on five or six meals, right now, and his food is delicious. He spend his time like I did a few summers ago. He takes his brother and sisters to various appointments, classes, or errands. Colin takes his mom to and from appointments every day and keeps the closets full of food to cook.

The most amazing improvement that stunned me was Colin on the grand piano. The family has a grand piano in the living room. Colin fills the house with so much music! It's unbelievable how much his playing has improved since I last saw him!

I didn't see much of Sam. She has a Thursday all-day class that she is doing really well in, has made good friends in, and seems to enjoy. Sam is still in charge of the animals at home and also has a job at a veterinarians that she is very excited about.

Ela is engulfed in the world of animation creation. Using cad software, she makes her sketches and drawings come to life. Ela spends hours on the computer with just one image, focused on the most important pixels. I am so proud of her animation talent and cannot wait for her to share with me.

The most meaningful time I had with the girls was a simple lunch outing. They both love to eat at

Culvers, so I got permission from Erin to take them to lunch. I said "order whatever you want", hit the drive-through, and drove a few blocks away near a park. We just sat there eating and chatting. I wanted to hear about everything they were doing!



Almost every afternoon that week, I spent hours with Teddy online playing MineCraft. That was awesome and immersive. Adults really don't know how fascinating and educational MineCraft really is. I sat amazed at how much game logic Teddy can apply and the level of skill he has to navigate through the levels of the game. I feel like a total padawan. Teddy is Yoda. The one who saves me from Zombies, teaches me how to mine, gives me back items I lose, and mentors me on the intricacies of the crafting table.

Jason and Erin have an amazing, evolving family. I have always been envious (in a way) of their lifestyle and beautiful home. It's not my path, but I am so proud of what they have built over their years together. Anybody within their friendship group is very lucky to be in their circle! I can attest to that. I'm lucky to have them as family.

The Family Grows

Teddy and I jumped in the car one day and headed down to Milwaukee. Teddy had asked his parents if he could skip morning school so he could come along. I was so happy they allowed him to.

Teddy and I get along pretty well for not seeing each other too much. This was an exciting ride for me because it was just Teddy and I. We had some great discussions while we listened to his choice of music. This is really the first time we have bonded. Teddy is a sixth grader now, so we can have deeper conversations than in the past.

The idea for the trip was just to pick up dad from the airport, spend a little time with him, and drop him off at the hotel near the dental school.

Dad flies up to Milwaukee every month or so to consult and work with dental school students on surgeries. He started doing this after his retirement and when TJ started studying at Marquette. Marquette, a private University in Milwaukee, is dad's alma matter and TJ's current school.



TJ asked his longtime girlfriend, Megan. It's a great story, but it's not mine to tell. Ask one of them to tell you. I cannot wait for this wedding. Hopefully I'll get to be there.

Ok, back to the timeline...

Teddy, Dad, and I found TJ and Megan's rental. Simply by chance, Megan had the day off from two jobs and was there too. They live in a real Milwaukee rental house on the top floor.

We had a relaxed dinner at a local Mexican restaurant and basically laughed. It's been a year and a half since I've seen dad, but he is still the same. Funny, healthy, on his game. It was great to see him. Even though it was only a little bit.

Since TJ has an internship for Oral Surgery coming up, that makes three generations of Oral Surgeons in our family.

We all went our ways. Teddy and I dropped dad off at his hotel, leaving a short road trip back for the little guy and I.



Teddy and I picked dad up at the airport. Dad looks very healthy after having Covid down in Florida. He was excited to give blood to help others. We checked dad into his hotel room and went looking for TJ's new apartment, a few miles away from Marquette.

This was the first time I was going to see the "new and engaged" TJ. Sometime before Christmas,

A Few More Highlights



I spent an afternoon and overnight at Mike's house near New London. That's part of my USA trip M.O. We sit around, drink beer, catch up. This time I was pleased to meet some of Mike's new friends.

Kappy has three boys. His "partner" Amanda, has two children. This was the first time I was with all of them at the same time. Hayden (oldest) was home from UWM. What timing! This was an awesome experience. I love seeing my Kappy so Happy! BTW...I had to take pictures with the little kids. They have friends at my school !!



One evening, I had the opportunity to cook, yes cook, for Joey and his mentor. Suffice it to say, my lemon zest asparagus tasted Out of this World and many stories were told.

I didn't want to go skiing at a Covid-controlled ski hill in Wisconsin with Kappy - sorry Kappy - so I ended up going for the weekend to the Kiedinger Cabbage.

Reality is Stranger than Fiction:

We went shopping for furniture at an Amish farm. We ate at a Bowling Alley nearby because they had a famous fish fry on Fridays - Sooo WISCONSIN. At night, we revved up the six wheeler and went looking for the neighbors. Mama - the new owner of the bar across the flowage - is originally from Switzerland! Small world.

Neither I, Joey, nor Danica have been on the frozen flowage at night during the winter. It was cold. After the bar we found the neighbors in their Ice Shanty. With us, there were seven people in there. Later, we all played dice back at the bar. After checking in on the SMFA's cabin - recently bought and in refurbishing mode - the three of us ended the weekend eating BIG PIG meals at the best diner in Tommehawk, Wi.

Weekends at the Kiedinger Cabbage is always a new experience!



A white ceramic mug filled with coffee sits on a wooden table. The mug has a humorous slogan printed in red. In the foreground, a plate of toast with jam is visible. The background is a blurred indoor setting with warm lighting and a bottle of beer on the table.

**ROME WASN'T
BUILT IN A DAY
BUT MAYBE IF
THEY HAD COFFEE...**