



A happy Christmas and New Years celebration to family and friends.

I (ken) volunteered to do the letter composing this year. It's not set to music, like Carol's letters. And if anything rhymes it's a complete coincidence. But it's fun having the chance to say hello to people we see too seldom. And since Carol is in another room she won't know what I'm writing.

We enjoyed a wonderful year. It had some very sad times, but, for the most part, they were times that were controlled by God's schedule. And each day I'm learning to grumble less and smile more. 😊

**Chapter 1.** The first half of 2018 was spent in Naples, FL, where we had great weather. Winter and early spring is the dry season in south Florida, so the grass stays green but rarely needs to be mowed. It's like astro-turf with ants. I had fun directing my community band of about 50 seniors and teaching part time at Florida Gulf Coast University near Ft. Myers. Carol started volunteering with Habitat for Humanity and showed them that she can do anything from laying tile to painting to helping put the roof on.

We drove to our home in Everett, PA, in early May and put in a nice garden right away. Carol planted tomatoes from seed and planned on half of the seeds not sprouting. All 24 grew and she didn't have the heart to kill any of them...so they all went into the garden. (More about that later.)

In late May we went to the first of three planned band camps. We can't say that Dayton was on our bucket list of places we wanted to see, but we left thinking that it's a pretty nice place and has very good ice cream.



**Chapter 2.** In July we left for our second camp of the summer—the one that we also planned to be a nice vacation in Oregon. We boarded the train in Altoona and enjoyed the rocking and chugging of the train across the Mississippi, near the Canadian border in North Dakota, and, finally, our destination of Portland, Oregon. Sadly, as we entered Oregon we got news that Carol's mother, Edith, had passed away. She'd been very weak for some time and Carol felt both sorrow that she'd left us and relief that she was now strong and in the presence of God. We got off the train and immediately made plans for the flight back home and another train ride through the Horseshoe Curve. The band in Bend, Oregon, sent an open invitation to join them another time!



*Horseshoe Curve--Altoona, PA*

Then the tomatoes started to ripen!



During the wet summer all 24 plants had grown taller than Carol. And I think we had another 12 “volunteers” that sprouted from last year’s crop growing along the edge of the fence. Ground hogs nibbled at the cucumbers and zukes, but were afraid of venturing into towering tomato forest. Wind and rain bent their tops into a tangled web that we had to crawl through on hands and knees at harvest time. We gave tomatoes to family and neighbors. We gave them to our summer band friends. We gave them to people we didn’t know. And they kept coming. I was almost ready to go at them with a chainsaw when they finally started to fade. By the end of September it was safe to go into the back yard again. 😊

**Chapter 3.** The last camp of the summer was in late September. We drove to the charming old resort town of Chautauqua, NY, where we stayed in the beautiful home of a musician friend from Florida. This was a fun time of making friends, making music, leading funny songs with the ukulele, and preparing to end my term as President of the busy New Horizons network of bands and musicians across the US and Canada. 😊

**Chapter 4.** Back in Naples, I decided to continue teaching a course about music in different world cultures. I came home one day and found that Carol was limping a little. “She’s finally starting to get older,” you may be thinking. But no, she was sore because as she was dancing across the kitchen countertops cleaning, she stepped backward into mid-air in a step somewhere between Ginger Rogers (dead) and Michael Jackson (also dead). I’ve always told Carol that I felt dancing was dangerous. As she fell, she hit her bottom bone on the granite countertop. She could have broken her neck! But all that happened was a bruised seat and bruised pride. 😊



As for me, I never dance on countertops, but I’m the one who is supporting the medical economy. A back tooth cracked, and while I was getting a crown for it my dermatologist decided it was urgent that he cut out benign cancer from just below my jaw. Before those stitches were removed, the eye surgeon removed enough sagging skin from my eyelids to make me a nice wallet. Of course, all of this made my blood pressure start to go up and down on its own. Just as we got this under control, my back doctor booked me for a spinal injection so I would stop walking around looking like the letter “Z”. Yesterday, I got news of a tear in my rotator cuff that was the result of my attack on our over-grown palm trees. And, just as 2018 comes to an end, I’m setting the date for cataract surgery. Not too bad for a healthy guy my age who doesn’t dance, especially on countertops. 😊



**Chapter 5.** We’re flying back to Pennsylvania from Dec 20-30 and are hoping for quiet time with friends and family. About two inches of soft, powdery snow would be nice. And if it’s about 65 degrees that would be great, too. We’ll be playing our horns at church on Christmas Eve. It doesn’t get much better than that. (We played a horn and trumpet duet at church last week and amazed ourselves that there were no train wrecks in the music. It went very well.)

What a joy. And we hope you are looking forward to a wonderful 2019, just as we are. Peace and blessings to you. Love,

Ken and Carol

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