

Hello dear friends and family! Here is our life in a nutshell. Photos on page 2.

Colin is 18 and a freshman at Western Washington University in Bellingham. He lives in the dorms and loves it. He plays lacrosse, which is a club sport, and works part-time at Ben and Jerry's when he's home. He's dating Maggie, whom we adore. She goes to school in California.

Ian is 21 and graduated from the University of Washington with a Bachelor's of Architecture in June. He's now in a two-year Master's of Architecture program at the University of Oregon and loves living in Eugene. He'll spend spring quarter in Italy studying Architecture and he and I will travel together for two weeks before the program starts! When he's not studying he loves swing and salsa dancing and indoor rock climbing.

Nick, 22, and his wife, Tia, moved back to Kirkland in September. They are both in school — she for nursing, and he for phlebotomy. Nick will soon have his hospital certification. He still plays guitar. He also builds computers and (he didn't get this from us) likes to go to the firing range...

Alex is 25. She's been living with us this past year, and working as a chef in an upscale retirement community, where the residents love her. She's getting married on January 13th to Ben France, an old friend and former co-worker who's in the Air Force. In October, she flew to Okinawa to visit Ben. In late January they will move to Pensacola, Florida for Ben's final 18 months of duty. Alex is thinking of going to nursing school there.

Grant has been busy with shop projects. He designed and built a trailer-mounted meat smoker, then cooked pulled pork and ribs for 120 people at a summer BBQ in a local park. He's now putting the finishing touches on a 2x72" knife-maker's belt grinder he built from scratch. Two years ago he spoke before the state pardons board on behalf of a man doing life in prison for non-violent crimes committed as a youth. We were so happy when this man was finally released in October. He is doing well. Grant continues to mentor other former inmates as they are released and struggle to learn how to live on the outside (the system gives them no help or training - it's no wonder so many re-offend).

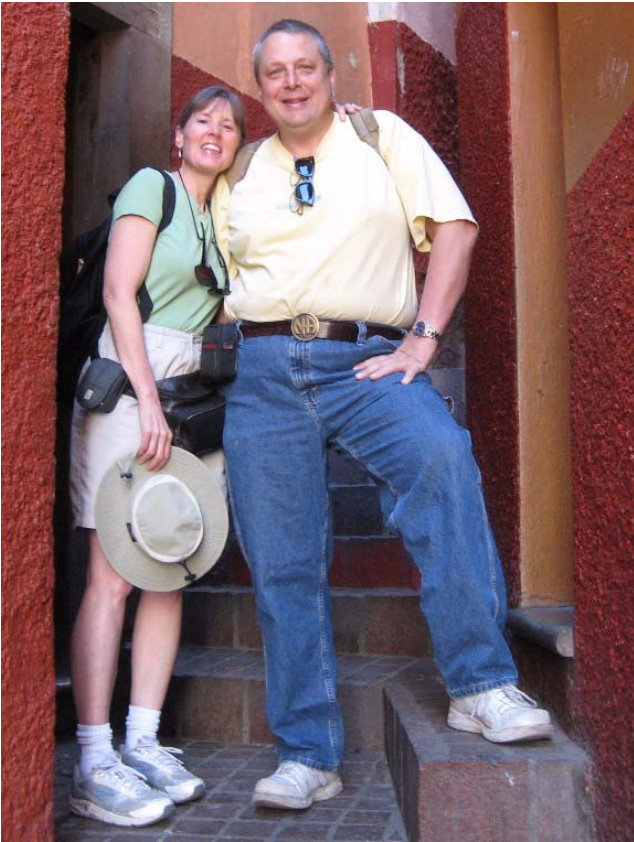
In February, Grant and I went to north central Mexico. For 10 days we swapped houses with our neighbor's parents in Guanajuato, a beautiful and not-touristy university town. We spent the last three days in surprisingly pleasant Mexico City.

As for me, I did in fact quit my tech writing job in July! I am having the time of my life, pursuing things I truly care about, including lots of volunteer work (summer concerts, park restoration, abolishing the death penalty in WA state, etc.), writing for local online newspapers, hiking, Zumba and fitness classes, dancing, networking, and various forms of civic involvement. I still sing with the bluegrass and swing band, Back Burner, and I've also started a jazz duo with a piano player. I am so grateful to have this time to explore my next calling.

In September, Grant and I thoroughly enjoyed a one month road trip to National Parks all over the western states. We bought a used van, built a platform bed in the back, and camped most nights, except for a few spent with friends and family. Sleeping in our van was extremely comfortable, saved a lot of money on hotels, and allowed us to sit by fires and enjoy being away from the lights and noise of civilization at night.

After looking at the costs, we decided that it doesn't make sense for us to sell our house and buy a smaller one, so we are going to stay put for now. We're renting half of our mother-in-law apartment to a friend, and will rent the other half once Alex moves out. We've also signed up to be couch surfing hosts. This free cultural exchange program helps travelers find a free place to stay for a few nights, while getting to know local people. You can choose to host travelers or to stay with hosts when you travel. (See couchsurfing.org.) Ian and I are hoping to couch surf when we go to Europe.

Love, Karen & Grant



"Kissing Alley," Guanajuato, Mexico



Colin graduates from High School with honors



Ian graduates from the University of Washington with honors



Grant & Karen's road trip van



Alex & Ben in Okinawa

Happy 2012!
Love, Karen, Grant, and kids