

Saturday, December 18, 2010

Dear Friends and Family, family's friends, friends' family, friends' friends-

First of all, I would like to answer a question that lots of people have been asking: "Are you working on another book?" Yes, I am. But the topic of this book is not ready to be released just yet. Don't take it personally, I just need to smooth out a couple of its rough edges. (Hint: This book is nothing like the other one.) So anyway, I guess you might want to hear about the animals. That's just a guess. In fact I



*Yeti (top right) and kittens moved into Tater's house when it got cold.*

think it's a good enough guess that I'll guess that it's right and tell you about the animals. The most recent addition to the Martin Non-Human Family would be the kittens. We found them a few months ago, in the back yard, and we decided that we were going to take care of them, because there is no way that a Martin of any age or type could reject a cuddly, helpless little kitten. There are four of them: President, Pork Chop, Sillybandz, and Twilight. Their mother is not quite as cuddly, in fact about a month before we found them we couldn't get within twenty feet of her without her running off. Her name is Yeti, and we can finally pet her for about ten seconds on end! Since there is so much to know about each kitten, I think I'll type in their Kitty Profiles.

Pork Chop: Pork Chop has always been the big guy, not only in size, but in attitude! When we dump out some food in their bowl, he establishes a corner and snarls if anything, including a human finger, gets anywhere near it. He is a wild mix of white and gray, and has short hair. Not a prime candidate for snuggling, he is like his mother in that he loves to simulate hunting in everything he does. Once his mom caught a ground squirrel, and he snatches it from her and drags it off. And of course the name was my idea.



*Porkchop atop Tater.*

President: President is an Egyptian sort of cat with piercing green eyes and silky black fur. He is definitely the most regal and elegant of the kittens. But recently, he has become aggressive- and sometimes he even trumps Pork Chop. He can even be funny- if I pick him up and slope him backwards,



President (top right), Twilight (left) and Sillybandz in the near-ground.

his head will go ever so slowly back until you can see an itsy-bitsy white spot on his neck.(We named him President because he is black like the real one.)

Sillybandz: I am telling you, you have never seen such a laid-back cat! Just pick him up and lay him on his back while rubbing his belly and he will not move for a minimum of fifteen minutes. He's a classic black and white with the green eyes of President, and he used to be the smallest but now the only one bigger than him is Pork Chop. The reason he is called Sillybandz is because he looks like there is a black bracelet around his white wrist.

Twilight: Mom won't admit it, but Twilight is her favorite! She is the smallest one, and is mostly gray with slight hints of orange. All of the spoiling goes to Twilight: She is inside VERY often, she is babied much more-I think she's just that kind of cat. The other cats just don't satisfy her social stomach, and she likes to be away from her siblings and mother. At the beginning, she was the shy one and would never leave Yeti, but I think she has

evolved. (Twilight is her name because we ruled out Midnight and Dawn.)

So these are the latest cats. It's the chickens' turn. We only have eight left from the original 13: Anne, Regalia, Midnight, Fluffball, Cotton, Candy, Spangle and Coconut. These survivors are heroes in the world of hawks, cold temperatures, cars and diseases. They at least deserve a little paragraph in the Christmas Letter!

Anne: Anne is a Barred Rock that is black and white striped. She is a tad skittish, but she is undoubtedly the braniac of the octet. On the coldest nights, instead of dozing in the bare trees, she actually chooses to sleep in the house we built for them- she is the only one to whom this absurd idea ever occurs.



Charlie first coaxes Anne from the tree

Regalia: Regalia is the biggest hero yet. A few months ago she was accidentally hit by a truck. Luckily Dad found her and brought her up to the house. She has to limp around now, but otherwise she's OK. She normally gets enough food, and is used to her sore leg now, so now we can add this to our official list of miracles.



Midnight, Cotton, Anne & Candy clockwise



Charlie carries Regalia in the snow

Midnight: An Australorp just like Regalia- they are also both pitch black, including their feet. But Midnight has taken Regalia's place as the regal one of the pack because of her puffed chest and the valley in her back.(I promised I would never name an animal Midnight because everyone does, but this particular instance was not my idea.)

Fluffball: Yes, I know you're wondering about the name. Jacq (my friend) wanted to name this one because it happened to be her very favorite from the first day she laid eyes upon the week-old chicks. Fluffball is a red-and-yellow Red Star who loves to be loud. If Fluffball wants something, she will bock and bock and bock!

Cotton: Cotton has always been independent from the others, mainly because she is the only one of her breed, Buff Orpington. She is a pretty yellow, but is skittish like Anne. She is called Cotton because of her soft feathers.

Candy: Candy is a small chicken with a big personality. For some reason, we are closer to each other than I am with any other chicken and she is with any other human. I have taught her to play tag; she



Fluffball boldly eats kitten & Tater food

will chase me endlessly and when she catches up, I chase her. I can even pick her up and hold her for a while. She is a Red Star just like Fluffball, but she's mostly red. If you want to know why she is called Candy, we don't have any idea.

Spangle: An Easter Egger who lays green and blue eggs. She is not very friendly, but she is beautiful with her assortment of colored feathers that pile up around her neck. They make her look really exotic.

Coconut: Another Easter Egger that is very small with a long neck. Her neck feathers are the precise color of a coconut macaroon! She is even less friendly than Spangle- it is nearly impossible to catch her.



Coconut in the summer

So those are the chickens. Finally, I'll fill you



in on Tater. He's not too excited to live in a world filled with cats and chickens, but he's made it through so far because of his hero and motivation, Dad. He's even learned to awkwardly snuggle with Twilight on the couch! And, of course, he is learning many things. Just today I tried giving him the Spanish command for "up" and the motion that goes with the word, and he leaps up toward the sliver of rotisserie chicken dangling above his head.

And the last domestic category found here: humans. Lately my interests have

blossomed from The Peanut Butter And Jelly Sandwich Two-Page Cookbook to more sophisticated sorts of recipes that include quail eggs, Roquefort, mangosteens, arugula, pheasant, etc. And from words like bumblebee to words like chrysanthemum. Even my piano interests are growing; I went from Mary Had a Little Lamb to Fur Elise. But my most prominent non-academic hobby is of course, food (I count writing as academic). Especially ever since Mom had to go dairy-free, some very interesting foods have turned up in our cabinet, so I've been happy to investigate. ( If you ever need to know anything about any fruit, herb or spice, just send Mom an e-mail asking the question you need to know, because by now I've probably come up with at least twenty fruits you might not have even heard of before! Anyone for a Yuzu?)

I know everyone that doesn't see me very often always asks " How's school going?" My guess is that 56.9% of the people that ask this are just being polite. So I'll keep it short. Recently I did a classroom spelling bee and won ( it was really close, though). I also tried the Math Match, which is a math competition held between fifth graders from Check, Willis, Indian Valley and Floyd Elementary. None of this is meant to indicate that I like school. The teachers are OK, and all, and I like our principal.

I'm sorry to say this, but my classmates are entering the crazy age. And I'm way behind- yesterday at a cookie party my friends were discussing a song that was playing on the CD player and I kept hearing them say "Demi Lovato". I asked who this was very discreetly to one of my friends and she explains that Demi Lovato is a famous teen singer. Then wouldn't you know that this afternoon I was watching Survivor Man and a commercial comes on about a teenage singer named Demi Lovato . Then I realized that I was way behind. Of course I don't need to tell you about Mom and Dad because they can do that.

Shayley

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Dear Family and Friends,

Not much I can add to Shayley's letter, except to clarify that she likes to ponder a variety of foods, not eat them! We have had a great year, full of life.

Exactly one year for me without treatments or surgeries—just regular scopes and scans and so far so good! Charlie is the one spending more and more time in medical settings, but thankfully it's his training to be a nurse. He has 3 semesters left and we're all very thankful that he has a few weeks off from school right now, though he continues with his appraisal work.

Speaking of his work, we had occasion to visit my great grandpa Newton Hylton's homeplace in Meadows of Dan on Thanksgiving Day (Charlie was asked to appraise it), though it's owned by another family now. It was nice to visit and show Shayley around now that she's older. I like the photos of her below. In the one on the left, she is looking out the door of a small one room house where my great-great grandma lived—and looking toward the house built by my great grandpa. Interesting how it can represent looking back and forward at once. (That is how this YEAR has felt for me—the first few months I was haunted my memories of the physical trauma of the two previous years, but in the later half of the year I have been looking ahead—all while trying to really live in the moment.) In the photo on the right, she is standing outside great grandpa Newton's blacksmith shop. The photo of Charlie and I was made on the same farm, exactly where we were married. So much has happened in these 17 years. And now, more than ever, we are grateful for each other. And for you all.

Wishing you Christ's perfect peace this season and always.

# Merry Christmas!

Lydeana and Charlie



Shayley looking out her great, great, great grandma's door at her great, great grandpa's house in Meadows of Dan.



Shayley standing next to my great grandpa Newton's blacksmith shop at the same farm.



Shayley took Charlie and my picture standing at the exact spot we were married 17 years ago.