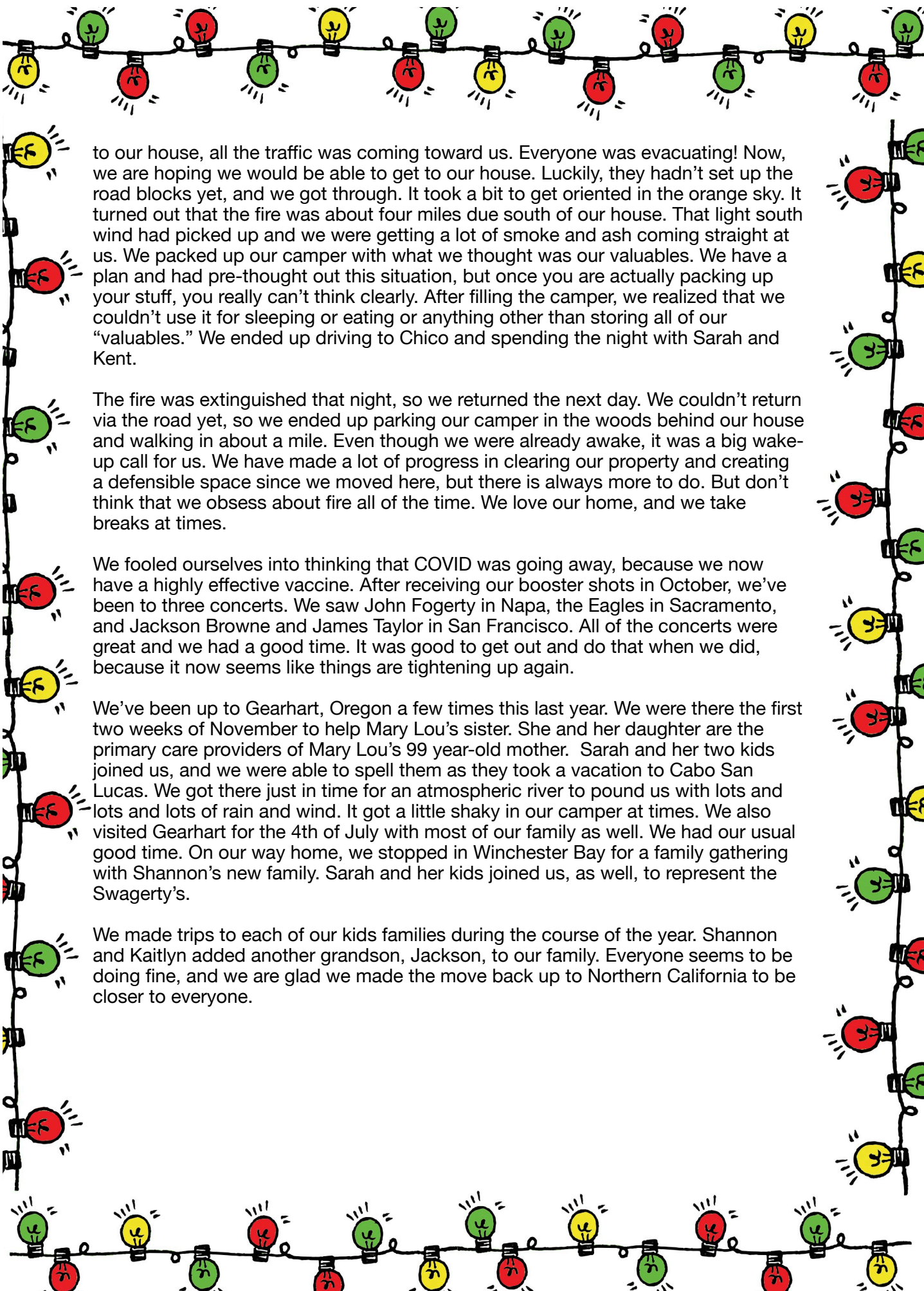


Merry Christmas, 2021



Back Row: Todd, Jake and Jasmine, Brian, Zacharie, Shannon, Kent, Sarah, Kainoa. Middle Row: Cori, Mary Lou, Julia, Claire, Kaitlyn-holding Jackson, Ana-hugging Mabel, Badegech. Front Row: Jesse, Eve, Josie, Gwen, Chris, Avery, Bodhi.

It was a beautiful sunny day in August, and we had been working hard to keep our property fire-safe, or as fire-safe as we can make it. We needed a break, and the High Sierra's were beckoning to us to make a visit. I'd been wanting to go to a lake in the Bowman Lake area, off of I-80 and Hwy 20. It was a blue-sky day with a light wind coming from the south. During late summer, we have to be aware of a north wind, as it is a drying wind and enhances the fire danger. We hadn't been to the Sierra's all summer, so off we went. We arrived at the lake and sat at the water's edge and drew in our sketchbooks. About 3:30 in the afternoon we left the lake and started heading back home. As we got into cell phone range, our phones started to beep, a lot. Just at that time, Mary Lou and I noticed a large thunderhead building in the sky near to where we live. After reading the text messages and evacuation notices, we realized that the large "thunderhead" was a large pillar of smoke. Now, we are in a semi-panic mode. We needed to get back home to see what our situation was. As we got closer



to our house, all the traffic was coming toward us. Everyone was evacuating! Now, we are hoping we would be able to get to our house. Luckily, they hadn't set up the road blocks yet, and we got through. It took a bit to get oriented in the orange sky. It turned out that the fire was about four miles due south of our house. That light south wind had picked up and we were getting a lot of smoke and ash coming straight at us. We packed up our camper with what we thought was our valuables. We have a plan and had pre-thought out this situation, but once you are actually packing up your stuff, you really can't think clearly. After filling the camper, we realized that we couldn't use it for sleeping or eating or anything other than storing all of our "valuables." We ended up driving to Chico and spending the night with Sarah and Kent.

The fire was extinguished that night, so we returned the next day. We couldn't return via the road yet, so we ended up parking our camper in the woods behind our house and walking in about a mile. Even though we were already awake, it was a big wake-up call for us. We have made a lot of progress in clearing our property and creating a defensible space since we moved here, but there is always more to do. But don't think that we obsess about fire all of the time. We love our home, and we take breaks at times.

We fooled ourselves into thinking that COVID was going away, because we now have a highly effective vaccine. After receiving our booster shots in October, we've been to three concerts. We saw John Fogerty in Napa, the Eagles in Sacramento, and Jackson Browne and James Taylor in San Francisco. All of the concerts were great and we had a good time. It was good to get out and do that when we did, because it now seems like things are tightening up again.

We've been up to Gearhart, Oregon a few times this last year. We were there the first two weeks of November to help Mary Lou's sister. She and her daughter are the primary care providers of Mary Lou's 99 year-old mother. Sarah and her two kids joined us, and we were able to spell them as they took a vacation to Cabo San Lucas. We got there just in time for an atmospheric river to pound us with lots and lots of rain and wind. It got a little shaky in our camper at times. We also visited Gearhart for the 4th of July with most of our family as well. We had our usual good time. On our way home, we stopped in Winchester Bay for a family gathering with Shannon's new family. Sarah and her kids joined us, as well, to represent the Swagerty's.

We made trips to each of our kids families during the course of the year. Shannon and Kaitlyn added another grandson, Jackson, to our family. Everyone seems to be doing fine, and we are glad we made the move back up to Northern California to be closer to everyone.

