

# 2017 Merry Christmas

## Nancy CHRISTIAN & NICK

May the love that was born on Christmas night  
light all your days with joy and hope.

## ...And Happy New Year!

*"Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow."*  
-Albert Einstein

Another Christmas is in the books; another New Year looms.

When I was a young mom, older women would stop me in the grocery store when I was frazzled from trying to keep my kids from climbing out of the cart and destroying a display of neatly stacked merchandise, or perhaps saying "no" for the gillionth time as they begged me to buy them some candy. The calm looking ladies who had the luxury of shopping ALL.BY.THEMSELVES. would smile wistfully and say something to the effect of, "The days are long but the years are short. Enjoy them while you can. They grow up so fast." I would smile through clenched teeth and somehow manage to keep from strangling them (and my children) on the spot.

And now, I have become them. I try so hard not to make eye contact with the young moms and their screaming kids in the grocery store, out of respect for what they are going through. But every now and then I forget and I find those very same words coming out of my mouth. I regret it instantly, of course. But someday, I know history will repeat itself and they will be saying the same thing to the next generation of grocery store warrior-moms.

In many ways 2017 was just like that. Some of the days were **LONG**...but the year was short. These are few of the highlights from our world.

Wishing you much joy and happiness this Christmas season, and sending much love to you and yours.

*Nancy, Christian, Nick, Sadie, and Mitzi*



### THE GRAY FAMILY EXPANDS....AGAIN

The Gray family added another member when Steve's daughter, Jessica, married Aaron Grijalva on September 30 in Denver. It was a beautiful wedding and a fun family reunion.

My parents welcomed another great-grandchild when Alicia's daughter, Sara, had her 2nd little boy, Logan, in September. Mom and Dad now have one great-granddaughter, and five great-grandsons. Steve's son, James, and his wife Jess, are expecting the 6th great-grandson in May. We are overflowing with stinky and loveable little boys!



### CHRISTIAN TURNS 21

Christian and I took a trip to New Orleans shortly after his 21st birthday to celebrate. We heard some cool jazz, ate some great food, and soaked up the city. Being a big-time WWII history buff, his favorite part was spending time at the WWII History Museum. It was nice having my own personal docent - he told me more about the exhibits than the museum did, and it is one of the best museums I have ever seen!



# Christian

Christian is thriving in his second year at the University of the Ozarks in Clarksville, AR. He made the Dean's List while pursuing a Political Science major with an emphasis in criminal justice, and minors in history and psychology. He loves to play Dungeons and Dragons and has become quite the Dungeon Master, organizing groups of friends, both this summer in Austin and this fall in Clarksville, into elaborate and imaginative scenarios. He took a fun vacation with his dad this summer to the California wine country, and went to Ann Arbor over the Halloween weekend to visit his brother for a "Bro Weekend". They went to a University of Michigan football game and hosted quite a Halloween party at Nick's house, shared by Nick and five roommates. Being 21, Christian was very popular with Nick's friends! He's hoping to do an internship this summer in Austin with an organization that focuses on social justice issues.



With Nick at the Big House in Ann Arbor, and as The Dude and Walter from The Big Lebowski for Halloween.

*I have faith in future generations with this guy fighting on the right side of justice.*

# Nick



What's Nick up to? One only has to say, "Go BLOOOOOO!!!" or "Go Blue!" to sum up his life right now. For the second summer in a row it was "Go BLOOO!" as he marched with the Bluecoats, a Drum Corps International drum and bugle corp. He attended several weekend training sessions in the early spring,



and then a six-week training camp in May/June before hitting the road and touring the country for six more weeks. The tour ended at the DCI final competition in Indianapolis in August. Following him and his mellophone around the county all summer is a bit like playing "Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego". He's gearing up now for his 3rd year as a Bluecoat in 2018.

He was home for a quick couple of weeks before we embarked on a road trip driving his car to the University of Michigan for the start of his sophomore year. It took two solid 12-hour days to get there. After spending the night in Memphis, we listened to the Hamilton soundtrack (both of us for the first time!) as we out ran Hurricane Harvey. We had a brief photo op at Lake Michigan before arriving in Ann Arbor, tired but happy. It was a blast.



He says "Go Blue" as a hard-core Michigan Wolverines fan with season tickets to the football and hockey games. He's pursuing a double major in French horn performance and Computer Science Engineering and loving them both. He's taking advantage of all the cultural arts performances offered on campus and with the Detroit Symphony. He plays French horn in the UM Symphony Band and works in a research lab developing a machine learning platform to detect drowsiness in automobile drivers. Because he has so much free time on his hands (HA!), he's thinking of marching in the UM marching band next fall. Because, WHY NOT??? And sleep is overrated.

# Nancy

I began the year by participating with my sister and my niece, Alicia and Sara, in the Women's March on Austin. I was blown away by the number of people, not only here in Austin, but around the country and the world, who participated in similar events. It gave me great hope.



In February 2018, I'll celebrate my 3rd anniversary as the Director of Communications at the Austin Bar Association. I continue to love my job immensely. It's a great fit for my skill set and I am amazed every day at the amount of community service and pro bono work the members of the Austin Bar do to help people with access to justice and other legal aid resources. It is a great team to be a part of.



In March, I reconnected with a group of college friends from my Texas Tech music school days. We met in Washington D.C. and went to hear our classmate, Susan Graham, perform *Dead Man Walking* at the Kennedy Center. That led to another trip with Laurie Lane and Tandra King in July to see Susie perform *Die Fledermaus* at the Santa Fe Opera. We've decided being a Graham Groupie is better than being a Dead Head - so we're spending this New Year's weekend together in New York City, catching her perform as *The Merry Widow* at the Metropolitan Opera. Life has taken us all on such wide-ranging paths since our time at TTU. Being reunited and realizing how much our lifelong friendships mean to us has been a real joy.



Jill Blalock Lord, Tandra King, Laurie Lane, Mark Synek, Susie Graham, me, and Susie's *Dead Man Walking* co-star, Michael Mayes

Certainly one of the highlights of the year was participating in the 2017 Leadership Austin Essentials class. The nine-month program brought together 60 of the most amazing, diverse, and accomplished people I've ever met. I learned so much from the program and from my classmates. It was truly a life-changing experience. Each month, we explored various issues and challenges facing our Austin community: the economy, housing and transportation, diversity and inclusion, education, health & wellness, and the arts & creative culture. One of the questions they asked us early on was "what is your WHY?" They encouraged us to identify our purpose and passion - and then to act on it to become a force of change through civil engagement. This was the perfect question to ask myself as I was redefining my life with an empty nest. Bells went off in my head and heart when we talked about Austin's arts & creative culture. As a former actress, singer, and music educator - I guess I shouldn't have been surprised, but it was good to gain that clarity. It was this realization that led me to dust off my creativity and begin acting again.

I ended the year by playing a leading role in an independent feature film shot in Austin called *Nana's Secret Recipe*.



The premise has been described as "The Golden Girls meets Breaking Bad." Picture a group of mature



**NANA'S SECRET RECIPE**

women opening a bakery and selling pot goodies to the local cancer patients...with much hilarity ensuing! The film is in post-production now and will hopefully be submitted to some film festi-

vals in the spring. The director has done distribution through Netflix with other projects in the past, so that's a likely avenue to see it later next year. I've also been cast in a leading role in a play called *Alabama Story*, being produced in Austin by Southwest Theater Productions the first two weekends in May, 2018. I have put together an acting website and have started a blog, if you'd like to follow my creative adventures: [www.nancygray.org](http://www.nancygray.org).



Sadie and Mitzi keep me company when Christian & Nick are away at school.