

While life pretty much revolved around the installation of the new titanium prosthesis, we didn't manage much in the way of grand family adventure. What little time and energy there was we chose to spend in new and different pursuits—namely in the maximizing

of our insurance returns. The shoulder quickly ratcheted us up above not only our deductible, but also our out-of-pocket maximum, and with the help of Krista hitting the big 4-0 and the invisible expiration date attached to such numbers,\* we took the insurance man for a real ride. We cheered with sick satisfaction at every zero-balance EOB to arrive in the mailbox. It's the simple pleasures. Also, we were struck by lightning again, so fear not—homeowners' got their due as well. And in the event that you know a guy, we're definitely in the market for a reasonably attractive lightning rod installation. (No jokes about Scott.)

Sensing our need for quality entertainment this summer, a bored and boorish black bear frequented the bird feeders just feet from the bedroom window, gorging himself happily night after night—for as usual, we were in denial and failed to do anything about it. It was adorable, really, Smokey laid out like a sleepy cat—this after the swift draining of the feeders with one well-placed paw-slap—and lapping up sunflower seeds sideways, so as to not exert any more effort in such tedious tasks as keeping his head upright. It was so adorable that certain members of the family thought it a good idea to sneak out into the blackness with a camera.

There are no pictures of the bear, but a nice shot of the illumined sky during the encounter. At the exact moment when said photographer was slinking out the back door, the satiated bear rose to lumber back home, and the two hunters met whilst rounding the same corner. Immediately the camera discharged a flash into the night, angled perfectly so as to blind the holder of the camera while giving the bear a first row seat to *Stupid Human Cinema*, alternately known as *The Ottinger Files*. What followed was muffled cursing and shrieking and a great deal of bumbling through bushes and bouncing off deckboards before eventually stumbling into the safety of the

house. There may have been silent bear snickering. I am happy to report the only damages done were to the feeders, despite every invitation to a mauling.

So there were new shoulders. And there were hungry bears. And there were stupid humans. It was a blessed year. And now the thirty-second 2017 mash-up recap:

\*You may recall Scott hitting a similar wall in 2010. For posterity:  $\label{limiting} http://bit.ly/XmasfromtheNexus.$ 





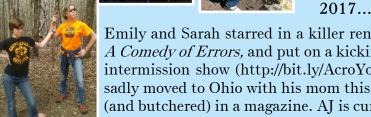


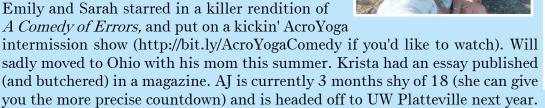


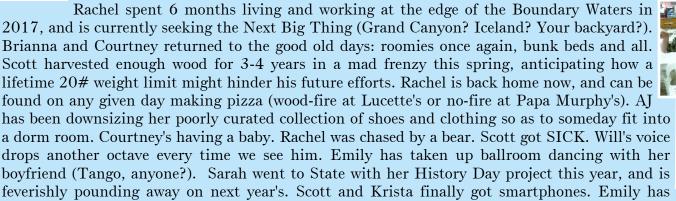












managed her way through yet another three concussions. (One by an errant foosball; I'm not even kidding. If you're counting, we're now up to six. And we're *done.*) Krista joined karate and the library board. AJ has endured many months as Guinea Pig Numero Uno of Sarah's Great Hair-Braiding Experiment. Rachel bought her first car, a snazzy 5-speed Honda (at the time of this writing, it may or may not be in the shop). Brianna snagged a manager position at her job at the group home. Courtney's moving to the Cities over the holidays. Emily got her driver's permit, and is a shockingly enthusiastic chauffeur. Scott

killed a mole with a pitchfork. And displayed it proudly for all to see. And Scott and Sarah have both tried to burn down the house since Thanksgiving.

That about sums it up. For the record, there are two distinct bears mentioned. One was a Wisconsin Bear. One was a Minnesota Bear. One was chased by a camera. One by a BB gun. Neither is advisable.

There were a few big ticket items in there; if you missed them, you scanned too fast.

Yes, Scott got sick. F'real. Some itinerant superbug passed through, glazing over all the rest of us (amateur targets), and headed straight for the greatest quarry, the Father. And bagged him. He was down for a week. Oh, how the mighty fall.

And yes, Courtney is having a baby! She's been living in Eau Claire (the bunk above Brianna), going to school full-time at UWEC, and working full time, but all that is about

to change! In June she and Alex will be bringing our very first grandkiddo into the world!

And with that, we will leave you to enjoy your Christmas. May it be blessed and filled with good things. Like babies. Not like bears.













