



One of our two motor rafts

In a word, “Grand!” That best sums up our past year. Clearly the highlight was a 7 day motor float on the Colorado with the Zapolsky-Hubbard clan. We flew out to Las Vegas to meet up with the crew, did a little sightseeing, then took a smaller plane (our 15 folks needed two planes, actually) to Marble Canyon to meet up with Grand Canyon White Water. Our guides, Matt, Easy, John and Ed took very good care of us and the other half of the trip who were not Zapolsky-Hubbards.

With the ages running from Robert's eight (he turned nine a couple weeks after we got back) to a grandfather, the motor rafts were the way to go. It was very different from David's earlier, 18-day private permit trip, but no less fun. Having the guides deal with all the logistics let us enjoy the place and the time together as a tribe.



The “veils”

It was stunningly beautiful from the mornings with the sun poking over the canyon ridge and eventually reaching the river to the afternoons and the final sunlight dropping off the canyon rim into the starlit strip of night between the walls. The experience should make some great memories for Robert to carry forward. It's impossible to pick any one most beautiful or memorable moment.

But one of the most unusual (based on overhearing the guides talking about it in hindsight) was the monsoon that stormed over us on the afternoon of day two. The wind powered rain (hail?) hurt when it hit unprotected skin. And the storm came up so fast some of us didn't think to get our rain gear out until the height of the quick moving storm, by which time it was too late.

The guides just pointed the rafts upstream and held them steady in one spot because the visibility was so low. The payoff was the “veils:” muddy waterfalls from every little, normally dry creek that streamed over the edge of the canyon. (Many more photos: <https://kayakero.net/link49>)



Robert tossing the Frisbee in Redwall Cavern

While the Grand Canyon was our big trip, we enjoyed quick trips to the West Virginia campus of Robert's school to open and close the place – and his 4th grade trip which included apple cider making. Yes, Robert is now over halfway through 4th grade; he's growing up and really enjoyed laser tag for his 9th birthday party.



David and Sarah above Tanner Rapids

Including a very nice birthday present for David: a snow day off from work. Later in the winter, after getting in lots of local sledding, we decided to make a quick trip up to Pennsylvania to do a little snow tubing. Unfortunately, we were not the only ones with that idea. Our snow tubing trip turned into a fun visit to Gettysburg – I'm sure we'll be back as this was too short a trip. With Gettysburg whetting our appetite for history, in the first false spring we took a train up to Philadelphia for a Franklin Institute program for Robert and a visit to the Liberty Bell and Constitution Hall. The program covered the Pompeii exhibit and included workshops on volcanology and molds and casts – using modeling clay to substitute for the ash and pumice of Pompeii (<https://kayakero.net/link51>).

And the last trip of this year's taxday letter was a grand excursion to Great Wolf Lodge for Robert's spring break. It was a spur of the moment decision based on weather forecasts looking less and less inviting as the week off from school approached. Robert and David picked up a classmate of Robert's and the three boys had a blast. When they were not in the wave pool, tube slides, surf wave, obstacle course, water tower or lazy river,



Robert below Bass Rapids

In the fall, We took our jack-o-lanterns to Cox Farm for their pumpkin smashing expertise – we chose the high drop for ours – and took a hay ride and run down the slides while we were there. Also in the fall, we spent Thanksgiving in Atlanta with the Williams clan; SMom seems to be holding steady there. And Robert and David helped Loren take down a tree in their backyard: chainsaw fun! (See <https://kayakero.net/link50> for more photos.)

For those not paying attention to mid-Atlantic weather, it was a really snowy winter for us. For snow fans, you could say a grand winter.



Sarah and Robert in Georgie Rapid

they were working through MagiQuest (with lots of trips up and down the stairs) and both 4th graders made it to the Master Magi level and defeated the dragon (<https://kayakero.net/link52>).

It would have been perfect if Sarah had not just started a new job and didn't feel comfortable taking time off. She has joined the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services as a senior social science researcher. USCIS is the friendly side of Homeland Security, encouraging legal immigration. This was both a move up in the federal space and to a significantly improved work environment; it's a job she really likes. She now

has the choice of Metro or Virginia Railway Express for her commuting pleasure. (David still loves his walking commute to PTO.)

We enjoyed seeing Bob Martindale post-retirement and had some epic Monopoly games; it's too bad he's moved back out west – I don't think we have the patience for Monopoly by email. And the Zapolskys converged on Northern Virginia for Christmas, giving us more time to visit with them over the holidays and an excuse to visit the Spy Museum. Speaking of Christmas, Robert's big present this year was a new bike – this one may hold him for a couple years as it's a bit big for him now and so has room for him to grow (<https://kayakero.net/link53>). On top of the Christmas visit, Ian stopped by on his spring break reminding us it's nice to live in tourist destination.

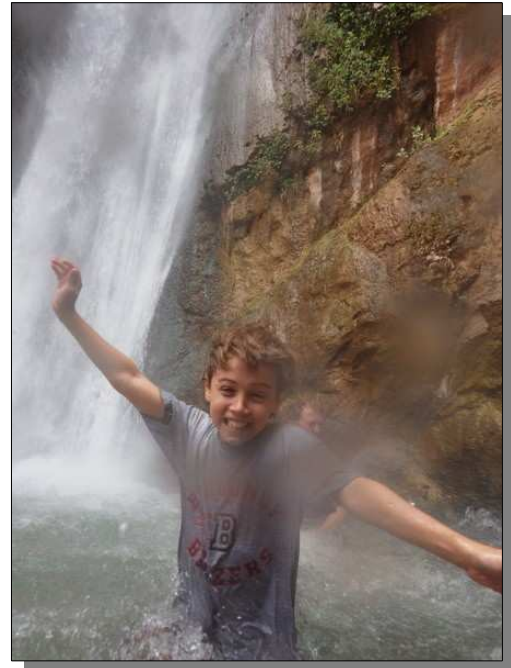
While the Colorado was the main river trip, we spent time on the Potomac as well. Many trips over the warmer months. And we discovered a new dock under the Woodrow Wilson Bridge that we used to go ice boating this past winter.



Ice canoeing, knocking down the ice wall

On the home front, the kitties all seem to be doing well. Even Zip Drive, at 16, is hanging in there fine – though he did have to have a couple teeth pulled when he had a ugly looking abscess. Pinker and Panzer are in full cat mode, “kitties” is really not the right word to use any more but a hard habit to break.

On the backyard front (so to speak), the Williams tradition of a platform tree house is taking shape. David's father, Loren, built one in Augusta, Georgia, probably because there weren't trees big enough to support a tree house



Robert at the base of Deer Creek Falls

We knocked down walls of

ice pushed up on the rocks and paddled the canoe onto an ice flow to watch a second flow slide across the first in a micro example of plate tectonics (<https://kayakero.net/link54>).

Robert played baseball again last spring and had lots of fun; we're debating this year's spring league when he would move up from coach pitch to kid pitch. Robert is leaning against it at the moment; even after enjoying our Mother's day trip to see the Nationals play last spring.



David and Robert on the Potomac

in that yard. Then Loren and (brother) Loren built one in Atlanta for the kids there. David felt his dad's presence as we started ours in the backyard this past fall (<https://kayakero.net/link55>).

On the technology front, David decided to follow some of Edward Snowden's advice: He flipped our website to https; all the network traffic is now encrypted. There's nothing secret or sensitive there, it just seems wrong to him for the NSA to see which pages of our website you frequent most. Also on the technology front, David and Robert set up a Minecraft server; let us know if you'd like to be white listed so you can join in.

Even if you're not a minecrafter and in the physical neighborhood, please do stop by; it would be grand to catch up with what's going on with you too.



Buried in the mid-February snow



Lazy river in Great Wolf Lodge



Robert on the Great Wolf Lodge surf wave



Top of the stairs in Constitution Hall, Philadelphia