

Here's To An Even Greater 2013!

I have to say that 2012 went out a lot better than it went in.

I will not dwell on the hardships we faced last year but I still contend that it made us all (in a sense) stronger and brought us closer together.

There were some happier times. I did get back on stage after 2 years and now I am back to the "no stopping me now" attitude since the next audition is this weekend! I am going to be honest here and say that I AM trying out for Captain Von Trapp. Max might be the comedic foil in [*The Sound of Music*](#) but not much of a challenge, personally. I feel that Georg would be much more of a stretch dramatically and it would be my first time playing the male lead (such as it is) in a musical. He does change throughout the course of the show so that would be very interesting to play. However, I will pray that whichever (if any) role I am asked to present that the next 2 months (or less) is successful for our little community theater group.

New Year's Eve was a HUGE day! The bank closed at 3PM and unlike Christmas Eve I was home in less than a half-hour after the doors were locked. Some of the family headed to mass and met others for dinner later. Then, my sister, nieces, and I headed over to "brother number 3's" home to ring in the new surrounded by great friends and **OODLES!!!!!!** (hopefully, this becomes a tradition as **EVERYONE** just **L0000000VES** that game.

MWHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!)



Not Even Thinking About It Yet

I know that it is only a bit over three months away but it will be here before we know it. I already have a standing invitation to help my new neighbors around the block prepare for their Christmas spectacular which they did annually while living in the Carolinas. Plus, auditions for Miracle on 34th Street (in lieu of the postponed Sound of Music) are next week, Yesterday, I was informed that Wally World has already started hauling out the holly not to mention the return of layaway. I remember when there was lawawat (I can't even spell it correctly) year-round.

Yesterday at my voice lesson, I saw a stack of Yuletide books underneath K's keyboard, Tis the season, already? Not to worry, I have a few weeks to decide on a few to work up as "I learn faster than most of the other students." Any suggestions? I have always wanted to put a nice "Ave Maria" in my rep AND this would fulfill a request for a foreign language selection.

Another remark from the neighbors (TK is an E-Town native) is the absence of things that were a part of our small town about 20-25 years ago... no more bakery, the town goes to bed with the sun, the second grocery no longer exists. I told her that Halloween consists of one hour Trick or Treat and a parade to the fire hall for a costume judging. Black Friday is another parade with Santa being driven on his Fire engine sleigh to the fire hall and then he returns to the North Pole after only one night of listening to the wishes of the little ones. And what happened to the carolers who would go door-to-door. She just shook her head when I told her that Scouts

(Boy and Girl both) haven't done it for years. Kind of sad.

I guess I have been thinking about the holidays (in a way) for a few months while I have been receiving FB posts of holiday lights set to sounds of the season and photos of A Christmas Story scenes (which will be making its Broadway musical debut soon.... eh... I'm sure it will be successful but, really?!)

Happy 100th Birthday

This year marks two centennial anniversaries. Of course, the most famous being the launch and sinking of the SS ~~Minnow~~ (err,,) *RMS Titanic*. Today, our village celebrated the anniversary of the dedication of Clem, the Civil War Monument that first stood at the intersection of Michigan Avenue and Indiana Street until it was moved to its present location on July 22nd, 1972 (just under a year before the author of this post made his own appearance in the world). Clem's dedication date was May 30th, 1912 but what a lovely (if a little warm) day to honor him.

My preparation for the day began shortly after my recital. I had been asked if I would be interested in performing a few songs for the day around the time of "Songs I Have Learned" but really had hard little aside from the inquiry. The songs I had to choose from was vast. I figured two from the Civil War era would be appropriate or anything patriotic. I decided on first, "Aura Lee" a little ballad written during the period which lent its melody to a very popular song made famous by a past artist which was the title of his first movie. ANYONE?! (no cheatin). With some help, I also decided on "Just Before the Battle, Mother" another lovely tune that was popular (with different lyrics) on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line.

I was going to perform the pieces accompanied by my guitar-playing coach. Unfortunately, she forgot that she had a prior commitment today. I eventually decided that I would sing them *a capella* unless a suitable accompaniment track could be found. Fortunately, yesterday I was informed that another performer for the event had a copy of "Aura Lee." Because I was really unfamiliar with my second selection, I decided to sing "America the Beautiful." A good thing I did, because the

other singer was singing "Just Before the Battle..."

This morning, I made my way to the bandstand where the accompaniment tracks were waiting. I could have sung them either way but the tracks were both easy to perform to even if they were in a lower key.

So, after the Right Honorable Mayor /Friendly Friar made his opening remarks and the high school band played a few pieces, I was invited to take the stand and performed my "five pieces." It could have been five; however, the other singer stole at least three of the pieces I had considered ("Oh, Shenandoah," "Battle Hymn of the Republic," as well as the aforementioned piece). I was congratulated on my performance by several members of the crowd who braved the temperatures.

At least there were not trains that passed by as happened a few years ago when my cousin and I performed during our summer festival.

All in all, a fun little ceremony and a very fitting tribute to Clem and all the service men and women who have made the ultimate sacrifice. Hopefully, we all made a special effort to remember them today but also everyday.

Easter Gala



What a way to celebrate the blessings of the suffering and resurrection of our Savior! The three day cycle is truly the most powerful, and beautiful time of the liturgical year.

This year seemed even more somber as my hometown community lost a true friend during the week. I was truly shocked when I read the post from Wayne's nephew on Wednesday. Once again, the funeral parlor that is a block away from our house was full to bursting on Good Friday.

Friday evening, I made the trip to Wally World with some family and finished birthday shopping for the notoriously difficult to shop for 16 year old (tomorrow) Godson. With some help from my happened upon ol' chum, I was able to come up with something hopefully suitable. Although, I think Elizabeth might get more use out of the 3D attachment for the iPhone ☐ I'm sure that the techno-saavy Joshua will find some pleasure from it.

Saturday night at our sister parish, Mare joined in the Catholic faith. Although I would have been honored to accept her invitation to join in the celebration, I had to work a 12-9 shift. CONGRATULATIONS Mary!

Which brings me to the merriment of Easter Day. Although each week's mass is special, there is something awesome and amazing about emerging from the 40 day journey of Lent. Hopefully on Easter Day, we can all look at ourselves and project a different "reflection" than when we started. One in which we are closer to our creator and yet knowing that at times we will inevitably fall short. After all, we are only human.

Father Art with his unique brand of humor drove the reflection point home by use of a full-length mirror. He constantly pronounced his dislike of said mirrors in every facet of life from fun houses to just looking into ordinary ones. Is it just me or is he part vampire? Or perhaps more likely, it was because the mirror he had was taller than himself.

This afternoon, the family gathered at the local restaurant for Easter buffet. One of the major Earth-shattering topics was the brilliance of the latest installment in the *American*

Pie movie series. I guess the cast has matured and gathered to celebrate a class reunion. Aptly entitle *American Reunion*, it sounds like a wait 3 months to rent flick to me.

Finally this evening, the family plus some of our extended members gathered at Jeff's for Shelby and Joshua's birthday celebration. And more creamed chicken sandwiches ☐ Honestly, I don't think I will ever let anyone forget the merriment of the wedding reception a few years ago. Before the evening was complete, the topic and television turned to golf. Like auto racing, this sport brings tears to my eyes. I take more pleasure in picking out the most original sounding name and rooting him on to victory. And did I pick a dandy! Unfortunately, poor Louis Oosthuizen lost to Bubba Watson in a playoff round. Seriously, Oosthuizen sounds like a close personal friend of the Swedish Chef. However, I was assured that the golfer is African.

Speaking of the Swedish Chef, I presented the new Muppet movie to my 17 year old niece. Shelby visited last week during Spring Break and asked if we could watch my copy and I decided that I would buy her own DVD copy of the fabulous Oscar-winning movie. "Man or Muppet" was a nice redemption for the horrendous loss of the nominated "Rainbow Connection" back in 1980 (I think that is the correct year).

I hope that you all were able to enjoy the love, beauty, and majesty of the Easter mystery!

Believing IS Seeing

NEVER THE OTHER WAY AROUND! Isn't that what this season is all about? The ability to believe in something bigger than ourselves must FIRST begin in our hearts or that belief is

sure to fail.

Believe in what your heart is saying

Hear the melody that's playing

There's no time to waste

There's so much to celebrate

Believe in what you feel inside

And give your dreams the wings to fly

You have everything you need

If you just believe.

We wrapped up our Christmas celebration at the home of my mother's sister. The last few days have seen sickness, some frustration, and I believe a LOT of love. Christmas Eve, we had our immediate family celebration. Alyssa was not feeling well but by the time the celebration began, she was well enough to eat a pickle and a deviled egg. Not my first choice after having a sour stomach but she kept it down. Alex also was feeling under the weather but came later and opened his gifts by himself.

Something new this year (prompted by the craziness of Santa's busy schedule) was the exchanging of names to fill each other's stockings. Some of us grumbled not knowing what to get each other but in the end, I think it worked out well and I hope the tradition continues. People just had to use their imagination (if they have one). I was pleased with my stocking stuffers choices.

Christmas Eve mass was even earlier than the 11PM of years past. I was pleased to see some more male voices come up to the loft as Chad and I are typically the sole men in the choir. Cousin Dan from Sandusky, JJ (a wonderful tenor), and

a few others joined us. Really glad for that because some of the rafter reachers would have drowned us out for sure.

Apparently, what must have been a traditional piece in years past was revisited. "The Bells of St. Mary" hopefully will become another fitting tradition along with "For Unto Us A Child Is Born."

After Chad dropped me off after mass, Mom came out and told us that she had to take Dad yet again to the ER. Complaining of stomach and chest pains and diarrhea. So we all headed to the hospital. I won't say "fortunately", but it could have been worse than dehydration. He had to have two units of IV fluids pumped into him. This year has been just a BIT scary and hopefully soon, we can get some answers as to what is going on. But until then, I personally need to really focus on stepping back when things get out of control.

After getting 4-5 hours of sleep, I had planned on attending services at the church being ministered by my pal who just continues to amaze me. I was so psyched that I did because he seemed to be surprised that I did. As an added present, he sang the beautiful "Mary, Did You Know?" Chris has such a tremendous voice that when he uses it gives each listener a extraordinary gift! It is also so inspiring to see how much he has personally come to accept his savior...a beautiful sight.

I was so thankful that I got to see the people I choose to include in my extended family on one of the most joyous days of the year.

Dinner Christmas Day was served at Jeff's kitchen. Before that however, Shelby sprained her ankle pretty badly when she climbed the stairs at my house in the dark. She had to be taken to have it checked out for severity.

Today, the celebration continued at the Maxwell Country Estate where both of Mom's siblings and their families gathered. I always enjoy being regaled by stories of their youth and today was no exception. Jeff, Alicia, and I played Words With

Friends via iPhone or in my case iPod. My oldest brother CHEATS with an app that actually says "Cheats With Friends."

Later, Dan and Carla tried to teach some of us how to play Mah'Jong. If I had been lucky enough to draw some good tiles in the three rounds we played... Of course, if we had had more time to play I might have caught on.

I hope you all are having a beautiful holiday season full of love and true belief.

A Muppetational Thanksgiving

What a fun-filled day full of loving (if a bit wacky) family with so many blessings given to us from above. So thankful that He has led me through this one of the toughest years I have had to endure with not only my own physical hurdles but hopefully within a few weeks those of my Dad and Chad's as well. Chad is having his gall bladder removed on the 1st and Dad goes to a specialist on the 2nd. I pray that both of them come out of these experiences better and stronger for the experience.

As tradition, I got up and helped set the table for the first of two feasts and then watched the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade getting a glimpse of some of the best of this year's Broadway shows and a sneak at the coming *Newsies*!!!! that would be EXTREMELY fun to see on stage.

Before we sat down to two long tables in the dining room and Mom joined a few of the littles in the kitchen, Alex provided the blessing. He is serving as chaplain in his Boy Scout troop. He says he is also bugler but has yet to get a bugle.

After the noon day feast, I stretched out and tried to nap...

NICE TRY! Not sure what we did, just sat around enjoying each other's company and viewed Elizabeth's video she made for her honors English or Lit class (whichever it was) a faux trailer for a new version of H.G. Wells' (not Orson, Jeff) *The Time Machine*. And at 4, the annual Drug Cartel of Dallas football game. And around 5, the Swary contingent arrived for the second feast.

FINALLY, a troop of us headed to the movies to watch *The Muppets!* YAY!!!!!! Highly, HIGHLY recommended! I would pay to see it again! Everything that I love about the old series and the movies rolled into one and with nods to both. The new character, Walter stole the show he was S0000000 adorable.

Cameos, singing, dancing, fun for the ENTIRE family. It could have done with a bit more Statler and Waldorf but still great fun! Mahna Mahna! In an interview, Jason Segel (who plays Walter's human twin, Gary and served as a writer and producer) stated that every generation needs a Muppet movie.

No spoilers just plain, good, FAMILY fun!

Finally, Chad and Cynthia stayed to go to shop electronics at Wal-Mart for Black Friday while the rest of us drove home.

Hope all of you my friends AND family had a blessed Thanksgiving filled with love. Do D00 de Do Do! Mahna Mahna! I think that will be stuck in my head for a few days.



A Time For Catching Up

WOW! Have I been lax in posting, or what?! Think I will use this space to catch myself and all my faithful readers up on the past few weeks (that have seemed like months. My second

oldest brother went back to the doctor on Friday last and now waits until November 17th to go to the surgeon to learn when he is going to go in for his gall bladder removal. Funny the time of this one! A few years ago, the night before Thanksgiving, I went to my oldest brother's house to sit with him following his own surgery... of which he had a photo taken (a nice mental picture for Halloween).

Speaking of tomorrow's holiday... I was not able to join in much of the frivolity this year. Last night was my Saturday to sing at mass and wouldn't ya know "tricks or treats" was at the same time. However, I did get to see some of the younguns in their ghastly get ups. Elizabeth was Ghostface from the ghastly *Scream* films and her new friend of the male persuasion came as Fred Flintstone. Noah was a Ninja. Alex was a banana who decided to go as Freddy Krugger (with Jason mask and hatchet) and Charlie Sheen. How he came up with Charlie Sheen is beyond me but he was "Winning" as he got a \$10 prize at the judging. Alyssa was a Ghoul Maid and Sydney looked like a young Glinda-like princess. I did not get to see Shelby in her Whoopie Cushion costume. Nor did I get to see the other three as Snow White, Wonder Woman, or the 2 week old as I Dream Of Jeannie. Hopefully, there will be pictures of those three sometime soon. Kyndall did win the prize for the youngest.

I just might have to dress up for my voice lesson in the morning. Speaking of THAT... my final piece for my "Songs I Have Learned" Weekender arrived in the mail via Jeff's mailbox last week (don't you love the mail system?). Now to get the other four voices together or at least inform them...

I hope you all have (or had) a frightfully ghoulish Halloween.

Now that the month is nearly complete, I pray that the final two months pass with a bit more good times because the last month seems to have had a bit more of the not so good. And watch out for those signed documents that peculiarly are not notarized or you may get a football pulled out from under you.

UUUUUGGGGHHHHH!



One Labor Day Institution Comes To A Close

Well... another summer is UNofficially over. It seems that once Labor Day is here, the kiddies are back in school and the county fair is about to begin, the scene changes. However, it is my favorite season. This holiday weekend is considerably different and I did not even realize that it was set to change this time last year. Since 1966, Jerry Lewis has been the face of the Muscular Dystrophy Association as HIS telethon began airing locally and has spread Nationwide since. In total during his reign, he helped raise \$1.66 billion to find a cure to the number of diseases which affect millions of "Jerry's Kids" around the world. Apparently, last fall it was announced that the 21.5 hour telecast would be chopped down to a six-hour broadcast on Sunday night from 6PM-midnight. That was not the only change to come.

In May, Jerry announced that this year's star-filled extravaganza would be his swan song but he would appear to close the show with his traditional take on "You'll Never Walk Alone." In August, the organization announced that not only would the comedian/philanthropist not "be appearing on the telethon" but also "had completed his run as [MDA's] national chairman." Dunno but it sounds like some water under that bridge especially when little has been heard from Jerry himself.

I had to work last night and went to a bon fire after so I was unable to watch any of the shortened broadcast. However, I

have learned that in the 6 hours \$61.5 million was raised (two million more than last year's total). I think it will be interesting to see if this version will be as successful as the last 45 years. I realize that 22.5 hours is a long time and technology exists that can get word out and raise \$2 million more than a year ago; however, it should be interesting to see if this year was more of a farewell for the decades long chairman.

Plus the fact that 2 days ago it was 100°+ and today's temp barely reached 60° has not been lost on me! I love the autumn season but a gradual fall into it is greatly appreciated ☐

Climbing The Mountain To The Loft

I hope that everyone who frequents my blog had a blessed Easter weekend... however they choose to celebrate it! On Good Friday for the first time since Christmas, I climbed the narrow steps to the choir loft for rehearsal for Sunday morning services (unfortunately, I could not join the group for services on the remembrance of the Lord's crucifixion).

Although it seemed to take forever to reach the top of the climb, it was very rewarding and another step forward.

Saturday saw the little ones taking advantage of two of the multitude of Easter Egg hunts in the area. Any more and two of the nieces would have been bouncing off the walls.

Happily, they both won at least one prize along with their trove of goodies.

This morning, as I was putting on my suit (also not worn since December), I noticed something strangely exciting. It seemed

as if I was swimming in the suit. I cannot believe that I have lost ANY weight over the last three months rather long feeling as if my pants were about to drop (even with a belt on). Don't get me wrong, I am really pleased that I have lost instead of gained... just surprised!

After celebrating the resurrection, the family (lost count of how many children my siblings have total) went to dinner at a buffet the ladies in the beauty shop have been raving. Actually a catering service which opens up on the weekend, Grant's (no brother, not the 18th President) Catering in Antwerp. Good, filling fare... good Oreo pie... and since we all can indulge (a little) now that the 40 days are past, I did not feel guilty.

I did finally locate a DVD that I bought a few months ago but somehow got buried. I am on the fifth and final installment of the [Percy Jackson and the Olympians](#) novels. The first, *The Lightning Thief*, was made into a movie a year or so ago. I like to think that Disney publishing was attempting to steal some of the thunder generated by the Harry Potter phenomenon.

The series centers around Perceus Jackson...(the demigod son of Poseidon) and his two friends: Annabeth (demigod daughter of Athena) and Grover (a satyr... half goat-half man). This time, reading the novels ahead did help my enjoyment of the movie.

Not sure how much I would have been able to follow it otherwise. A passing knowledge on the legend of Greek gods and goddesses wouldn't hurt either. I don't think anything will surpass the Potter juggernaut (at least for a while) but I found the books and movie to be fun.

So, a blessed and fun holiday was enjoyed with the family.

Wednesday, the house will once again be transformed into Walton's Mountain □ as we welcome back our little family from Alaska who will be staying with us until they get settled back into the area.

A Year Full of Ups And Downs

2010... What a year! So much happened that I do not know where the time went! It started off LAST January when I received my first two awards for acting in *You Have the Right to Remain Dead* (as everyone's ill-fated, lovable, hammy narrator... Harnell Chesterton) and for bringing the Grinchi Scrooginess of Mr. Henry F. Potter to life in *It's a Wonderful Life*. Even my best friends gave up a Bears' playoff game to share in my moment as well as family!

I can't even fathom the reality that I had limited myself to only two plays this year. I tackled my first lead role in the three person DRAMA, *Miracles*. I hope that Dawn and Rebekkah share in my belief that this play was one of the best shows I have ever been a part of. Thank you Beth for pushing for this show to be done and spreading its important, powerful message.

Chris next challenged me to seek out a new vocal coach. I had wanted to find one ever since Emily passed; however, I was uncertain as to whether I could find one as determined to help me in what I need to do. Thank God, he helped me find Kathrine. I could not ask for a better coach. I just adore people who know where your talent lies and are willing to guide you with suggestions on how best to cultivate them.

Over the years I have had and continue to have some of the best!

I also became a board member of a new theatrical group in which I get to spend more time with my friends and help to bring *The Wizard of Oz* to the stage next summer. I also had my first byline when I reviewed the company's production of

(Cr)Oklahoma! last summer.

My final performances of the year came in the Mare helmed production of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* in which I played a dual role as Barrymore, the caretaker of the Baskerville estate and as the doomed Selden who met a rather grisly demise. Each production lends some challenge as well as fun working with old friends and making new ones.

The fact that I only limited myself to two shows this past year allowed me to do some very cool things with my friends.

In July, we went to Cincinnati to the zoo and then to Kings Island. I had not been to one of my favorite parks in several years and to go and be treated as V.I.P.s was extraordinary.

Not to mention the multiple game nights (from which I just opened 2011), chats in person and via I.M.ing. Just good times!

Of course a year is not all roses. On January 5, we lost our beloved Aunt Carol to cancer. Gone long before her time but held on longer than many thought she would. And more recently, my brother separated from his wife. I think that ultimately with the help and guidance of prayer and the love of family and friends striving forward yet remembering the special times only make us stronger.

So as we bid farewell to 2010, wrap up the holiday season and look ahead to the new year, I wish all of you the very best of peace, joy, and happiness.

Should auld acquaintance be forgot and never brought to mind?

Should auld acquaintance be forgot, and days of auld lang syne?

For auld lang syne my jo,

For auld lang syne,

We'll take a cup of kindness yet,

For auld lang syne.

HAPPY NEW YEAR EVERYONE... GOOD NIGHT!