

# Harrison A-Team: 2018 in Review...

Well, here it is, time once again for the annual News-y letter from the A-Team!

Each year this time of year rolls around and I think "Is \*THIS\* the year that I stop sending physical snail-mail Christmas cards?!" And each year I end up contemplating giving it up for a few days, and then I eventually cave in and begin the grueling process of sending the mass bulk mail annual publication- which of course is nice to have sitting on your counter or whatever for a few weeks... and then everyone eventually is left with the same conundrum: All of these cards simply prolong the guilt of having to throw away someone's adorable photocard. Well, having experienced some recent health challenges, I have decided this is the year. I'll still have the cards made (thank you, Shutterfly, for the ease of popping a photo onto one of your thousands of templates!), and I will still write this letter so I can remember what the heck we did all year, but I will no longer do snail mail sending, being that I will just post digital copies of all this. And you know what? I was shocked to discover that I experienced freedom like never before: I can't believe I'm actually writing this, but ZERO F's were given. Perhaps it's because of my recent brush with death, perhaps it's an excuse for being lazy. Whatever the underlying reason is, I am definitely reminded that what's important in life is PEOPLE, if I can spend more time hanging out and connecting over the holidays with the souls I love the most, then that's why it's all about. And if people don't have social media, where I will end up posting this, most certainly, than that's OK. They don't need to read it, and that's beyond alright. After all, in the words of Toulouse-Latrec, I cannot say enough that this year I've so been reminded that "the greatest thing I've ever know was just to love and be loved in return."

Ashley is 17, and is staring down the barrel of beginning to think about colleges and SAT's. It's unbelievable, yet at the same time, she is just so ready- not ready as in she's itching to make the next step, it's more like she's actually a capable adult-which, in my mind, is absolutely so comforting as a parent. She is, no question, the most responsible, accomplished, competent teenager I know. She's still on 3 cheer teams- the higher level competitive cheer team, and 2 school teams- one "Game Day" team and one School Competitive team, who made State again this year. Ash is social, resourceful, she manages her time well, she knows how to ask for help, she's a problem solver, and she doesn't assume her parents will just get her out of a jam or a difficult situation. She doesn't let anyone tell her what to do, she says her best yes's in life. I just shake my head and wonder how this happened so fast and how she became so well-equipped for life. We couldn't be more proud of her.

Alex turned 16 this year- now we have 2 drivers! Springtime brought another year of Alex proving to be a track star once again. Over the summer, he and Ashley spent two weeks in Costa Rica on a mission trip with a team of kids from school. Alex made an incredible video of the trip which summarized the experience so completely, it was almost impossible not feel like you were a part of the whole thing. They stayed in host homes and taught the kids how to play team sports in a camp setting each day. They did so well being so grossly out of their comfort zones. Returning home from Costa Rica, Alex jumped right into a 2 week Digipen Camp, once again fine-tuning one of the many aspects of his technology craft. Alex has always been service-oriented from the time he was a toddler; He once staggered into my bedroom, valiantly attempting to carry one crying newborn baby Austin to me, deciding it was time to feed him. Well, in a similar spirit, he joined the local Young Life Group this year and has assisted in volunteering with Seattle Union Gospel Mission. He joined Ashley on the 2 school cheer squads this year, and I am so amazed with how well he learned how to stunt an lift cheerleaders without any gymnastic experience at all. True to form, our Alex keeps re-proving he is a Renaissance man and seems to effortlessly pick up any task or challenge set before him. Impressive to put it mildly. Alex is caring, devoted, helpful, wicked smart, and loyal to the end.

Aussie gave up football this year and swapped it for basketball. He had another amazing birthday where he got to hang out with Russell Wilson (Seahawks Quarterback) AGAIN, as he did last year. It was just by chance Alaska Airlines had another event on his actual birthday for the second year in a row. Aussie is a diehard Seahawks fan, not deterred by how the season is going, he's loyal year after year, so having 2 birthdays with Russel Wilson is like a recurring dream come true. What a lucky guy! In the spring, he was given the role of the Scarecrow in "The Wizard of Oz" alongside Ava as Dorothy. They two of them nailed it, and they are extremely talented actors. Every year I reiterate that Aussie keeps us in stitches- and it's still true, all the way! He is the funniest guy I know! He's coachable on all levels, and he has proved that he can learn from his mistakes, and recover. He's proven that every setback is a setup for a major comeback. We are so very very proud and thrilled of who he's becoming.

Ava turned 12 this year, and I watched that sweet baby girl graduate from 6th grade and start a new milestone at the main campus at school. She is still, hands down, the most kind-hearted, tender, loving, selfless soul I know. I loved celebrating her birthday with her by running off to a hotel room, ordering room service and watching a "Gilmore Girls" marathon. Quality time that I was so very blessed by and don't ever want to take for granted. As mentioned above, she killed it as Dorothy in "The Wizard of Oz", and I truly will hide that performance in my heart forever- she was just fantastic. In September she broke her wrist right after making the D1 Volleyball team at school- a disappointment that she handled with dignity- better than I would have, that's for sure. She is still very connected to her younger siblings in a unique way that she shares just with them- they look up to her, admire her, and understand her. She is creative and active in her playtime with them, and basically it's the cutest thing I've ever seen. Her authentic, loving, care-taking heart is a treasure they cannot possibly understand until later in life- but what a gem she is both to them and to us- a gift beyond measure. Ava has adjusted to junior high with ease; and she remains curious, inquisitive, and welcoming to friends new and old. Sharing her world is one of my favorite parts of my life.

Annalise turned 5 this year, which was incredible. So many memories came flooding back to me, I think having 4 babies in five years... twice... can tend to be a bit of a blur at times, but I so distinctly remember being pregnant with her, and now it seems like that was just one blink ago. She celebrated by a trip to Disneyland with her friend Harper. September rolled around and she Started Kindergarten, which is just crazy to me! She attended her first Daddy-Daughter Dance with Andrew this year. Annalise is a little firecracker like no other- she is goofy, cuddly, boisterous, refuses to be excluded, forbids you to forget she's around, and is oddly self aware for someone her age. For example, she tends to hate when Andrew and I go on a trip together, and it acutely aware of why that is: She tells me, "I'm afraid you'll forget about me, and if you love dad you might love him more than you love me." It's like, woah- I don't know many people my age and above who can so accurately pinpoint the root of their reactions to certain situations, certainly no 5 year olds I know. She's one amazing, special girl. I just cannot imagine my life without her- what would our family be if we only had 4 kids and never were hit with the gift of her presence? At the end of the day, she loves to sneak into our bed and snuggle up with us and grab a few minutes of alone time- if we are out, she will wait up for us, just to say goodnight. She's definitely less sassy, now she is more like a combo of sweet, sassy, and silly. What a joy she is.

Archer started Pre-K this year, 5 days a week! He is a sweet and sensitive soul who absolutely refuses to let anyone leave the house until he's given them a hug and a kiss goodbye. He's an early riser, much like his dad- wakes up fairly religiously at 5:30 or 6 AM and I think he really enjoys that quiet time before the chaos of the rest of the house inhabitants begins. Archer still does swimming lessons, and I enjoy seeing him every week at chapel. Trains are still a big thing for him- prior to the Christmas season ensuing, I think he watched "Polar Express" this year about 100 times. Has made his debut in some cute little movies written and directed by Ava. Arch is sweet and kind, and He loves to tell you every detail of every story he knows. He has the most infectious, contagious laugh. He brings a example of the importance of love and self-care, and I admire him for that. My favorite thing he's been saying repeatedly to me this year is "Mommy, You're So Very Pretty!"

Anders is two, turning 3 in March. He is talking up a storm and bouncing off the walls- par for the course for the age. His activities include swimming and music class, and he's a big fan of going to the Children's Museum. He's besties with his big brother Archer- they actually currently share a room which is, in my opinion, a big joke and causes way more problems than it's worth, yet everyone except me thinks they adjust and everything will be fine. It's been a year now, so I keep waiting for things to improve... I guess maybe it takes longer than I think. :) Anyway! Cute and sweet and was called a sweet "gentleman" by a doctor, who loved talking to him as he has the cutest little whisper-whisper-voice when he's feeling shy. Fell on a barstool and received his first set of stitches. (What 2 year old journey would be complete without stitches?) We are so thankful for the endless fun and cuteness and energy he brings to our lives. :)

Audrina unbelievably turned one this year. It's astounding. Man, she is one happy and cute baby. She's definitely a lady killer- at nighttime sometimes we peek in just to see her snuggly cuteness all curled up on her tummy, backside in the air. We definitely ended on a "high note"! She is just about the smiliest, giggliest baby ever! She's been walking since September, and she is quite sturdy on her feet- running all over the place now, climbing stairs like a boss. She loves swimming class and music class with Anders. No more baby food for this champ- and she is talking a little bit now which is just a blast. She will drop everything and come running with a gasp and a joyful yelp of excitement when she hears Andrew or me, which is just the freaking best- and we will miss it when we don't have little ones anymore. Because of Archer's love for trains, she has just started to say "choo choo" when she sees one, and she confidently calls "bye bye" with a wave, and of course shouts "ma ma"/ "da da". Without exception, all the kids love to try and get her to say their names- which I'll admit is kinda priceless to me. She definitely melts all of our hearts, no question.

Travels included mid winter break vitamin D in San Diego/Carlsbad, Maui for spring break, Amy & Andrew to Australia in June. The whole family ventured again to Mt. Hermon for annual Family Camp, Young Life Camps were attended by the 4 oldest kiddos. I took a Mom & Daughters' Girls Trip to LA, and also a Mom & the Boys to Tip to Santa Cruz, respectively. Then in the fall, great fun was had on an entire-family trip to SF Giants game. In October we took our oldest 4 on a week long trip to Spain, which was a fabulous trip with a lackluster ending. If you follow us on Social Media you know the whole sordid story, but basically upon our return home, I discovered somehow I had caught a virus which ended up affecting my heart and left me with a cardiomyopathy. I am expected to regain full strength we are hoping within 6 months, so sometime during the spring of 2019. The babies took a toll on my body, but I continue to say they were worth it without question! Obviously!! :) This Christmas we are looking forward to making our annual pilgrimage to Leavenworth with friends, and then enjoying a but of a "reset" in Palm Springs for a few days to celebrate the New Year with our immediate family.

If I had to pick just one highlight this year- it would be celebrating our 20th Year Anniversary. Andrew and I have various trips and celebrations planned all year, because, HEY- what a great excuse to slip away alllll year! But seriously, my greatest honor and highest joy of 2018 was putting on my wedding dress, just 3 weeks after being discharged from the hospital and renewing our vows with 50 plus friends and family at our house.

Of course, every year has its unique set of customized ups and downs- and 2018 was no exception. But despite my health challenges, like I think the most precious thing to me has been watching my husband so lovingly and tenderly care for me as I convalesced. He continues to prove, even after 20 years together, that he was serious when he said the all-too familiar (and not always followed) words: "For Better or for Worse, In Sickness and in Health."

Someday all these kids will leave us and this house will be quiet. Someday I will not be running 9 lives besides my own, and I will miss it, in part, I am sure. But I'll never regret the time I've invested into my marriage: all the dates, all the trips, all the books read to each other, joys and heartaches shared, sentences completed by the other person. When the house isn't bustling with activity and there aren't phones pinging every few minutes with constant text messages, the two of us (God willing) will still be here, together. I like to practice staying in the present moment, but I also look forward to the different joys that season will bring.

"I know what it is to live entirely for and with what I love best on earth. I hold myself supremely blest- blest beyond what language can express; because I am my husband's life as fully as he is mine." (Emily Bronte, Jane Eyre)

Wishing you a Very Merry Christmas, Holiday Season, and Happy New Year.

Love Always-

Amy (....and the The A-Team)

Andrew & Amy, Ashley, Alex, Austin, Ava, Annalise, Archer, Anders & Audrina.