

Joseph Lee's Letter to Family and Friends – 2025

Joseph Lee

August 2, 2025

Part I

I could not be happier to share my fourteenth letter with you on my fortieth birthday. Every year I share a letter explaining the progress we have made and the goals we will continue to pursue. As we enter the next decade of our life, we cannot help but feel that we are being propelled forward with tailwinds that we have gained throughout the past four decades, tailwinds that push us toward achieving all of our goals with seemingly no effort, and tailwinds that strengthen every year. As usual, I will explain how specific events of the past have put us in the position where we are today, and I will also lay out the roadmap for our journey going forward. Thank you for all your support. I hope you enjoy the letter.

You Decide Your Own Level of Involvement

In the next five months, we make two trips across the Pacific Ocean, to Japan in a couple of weeks and back to Australia over the holidays. In the past two years, we traveled to Australia, France, and the Bahamas. We are really just getting started on our travels all over the world, but to really get a sense what is going on right now, let me first take you back to fifth grade.

In fifth grade, I made a new friend who would stick around for the next thirty years of my life, Josh Nieman. Now you know my friend Josh Nieman, but you have no idea how much work the words *I made a new friend* are doing in that previous sentence unless you were present in fifth grade. In fifth grade, I wanted nothing to do with this kid.

My interests back in fifth grade were almost entirely focused in three areas. I played basketball. It was not the only sport I played, but it certainly was the main one. My friends throughout my childhood all played sports. Josh did not play any sports. If you talk to him today, he will pull out his old photos from the YMCA to argue he played sports just like any other kid, but trust me, he would not be on my team if we were doing a school-yard pick.

Outside of basketball, I was also interested in academics, mainly mathematics. For those of you who know my friend Josh, I do not have to go into detail here to explain how we did

not share an interest in academics. My third and final interest is the only place you could make a case that we had anything in common. We were both young boys, and we were both interested in young girls, certainly an appropriate interest at the time. But outside of trying to pick up the cutest girl in school, we really had nothing in common, and I had no interest in gaining a new friend.

Despite my lack of interest in the relationship, Josh did follow me around that entire year. Fifth grade, in fact, would set the tone for our entire friendship. He would follow me around everywhere at school, talk to me as I gave him the least amount of acknowledgment or response you could imagine, and by the end of the year, a friendship was born. Throughout the rest of childhood, we were thick as thieves, but the only reason we formed this bond was because Josh decided that we were going to be friends.

Which brings me back to today. I have been traveling the world, with my mother in tow. But do not misunderstand how we became travel companions. I did not ask my mother if she wanted to go to Australia, or France, or Japan. Like Josh, she just said she was coming along. And, just like my relationship with Josh, I am very grateful my mother decided she was going to join me whether I wanted her to come or not.

Sustainable Travel

If you did not put them in your calendar when I announced the dates last year, here again are the remaining destinations of phase one of our international travel plans.

Japan (August 17-25)
Australia (December 25-January 2)
Germany (May 22-28, 2026)

It is important to understand that these international travel plans are not a bucket list of the destinations that we want to visit. Of course, the literal definition of a bucket list is simply a list of things you want to accomplish—in this case, places you want to visit—before you die. If we only consider the denotation of the term, these destinations could be mistaken for a bucket list. The first phase of our international travel plans, however, are almost the antithesis of items on a bucket list, if you consider the true definition. The clear connotation when anyone is talking about a bucket list is that they view the life they currently live as lame and unfulfilling, and that at some point in the future, they will pursue the things in life that they ultimately seek to do or accomplish. Our travel plans represent the opposite. These travel plans represent our sustaining commitment to travel the world for the rest of our lives. We are not at a point financially where we can travel 365 days a year. We are, however, at a point financially where we can guarantee a minimum of two international trips per year for the rest of our lives. We have built a two-international-trip-per-year annuity that is sustainable for the rest of our lives.

I will outline Phase Two in next year's letter: make sure that you bring your calendars.

Raymond K. Hessel

*What do you wanna be, Raymond K. Hessel?
The question, Raymond, was what do you want to be?
– Tyler Durden*

I am not going to hold a gun to your head and ask you what do you want to do with your life, but I am going to challenge you in my annual letter on my fortieth birthday: do you have any interest in traveling the world? And if you do have an interest, are you going to make any immediate choices to put yourself on the path toward realizing those ambitions, or are you instead going to create a bucket list to assuage your feelings about your disappointing life?

If I have not convinced you yet how easy it is to decide that you are going to travel and to bring those plans to fruition, let my mother make an even simpler case. You could just travel along with me. Do you have your life in order enough to travel with me, and if it currently is not, what changes could you make to arrange your life accordingly? If the answers are not obvious, allow me to make some suggestions.

I strongly believe that having a spouse is the worst decision a person can make, and on top of that, the worst type of spouse a person can have is a husband. If you are in this situation, I do think it is highly likely that this marital status would create an obstacle for you joining me on a trip around the world.¹ One wrong decision does not have to ruin your entire life, and if a spouse is the reason that you do not think it is possible to travel the world with me, my suggestion would be to get a divorce.

Aside from any relationship changes that you need to make in your life, the main thing you really need to worry about is scratching together enough funds for an airline ticket. Aside from the airfare, our trips abroad are largely not too expensive. We do not eat at lame, expensive restaurants. If there is outdoor seating at an amazing place, we will eat at a nice restaurant on the pier at Circular Quay or on the beach at Cronulla, but for the most part, you will catch us grabbing McDonald's or packing a cheap picnic for the day at the beach. Scrounge up the change and pack your bags: we are just getting started on our travels around the world, and you have no excuse not to join us.

*I'm keeping your license. I'm gonna check in on you. I know where you live.
If you're not on your way to becoming a veterinarian in six weeks you will be dead!*

¹Although I want to be perfectly clear here to any young, married women reading my letter that this is definitely not an obstacle as far as I am concerned. No shaming at all if that is what you are into.

Part II

Real Friends

*I'm just lookin' for some real friends
All they ever do is let me down
– Camila Cabello*

When you are growing up as a child, I think it is easy to not understand how different everyone views the world. At least for me in particular, I thought I had everyone clocked at a very young age. There is this lie that goes on when you are a young child revolving around holiday fictional characters. Of course, you are told these harmless lies about Santa Claus or the Easter Bunny, but I am not talking about the existence of these traditions. Instead, the lie that I found disconcerting as a child was when people pretended these magical holiday creatures were fooling anyone. People would make a big deal about it, asking “Who told you that Santa Claus is not real?” There is this big myth that people are told Santa Claus does not exist. There is not some underground telephone system of children spreading the word to their peers that they are being tricked and coerced by their parents into believing imaginary, magical characters. No one tells anyone that Santa Claus does not exist. Even as a child, you have enough rational ability to understand these stories about Santa Claus are complete fabrications.

Here is another example. As an older child, I spent the vast majority of my weekends hanging out with Tom Langan. Spending so much time with the Langans gave me more perspective to further understand the world around me.

My family was Catholic when I was growing up, and we would occasionally² attend mass on Sundays. But the whole charade of my family going to church did not fool me for a second. No one whispered into my ear, “Your mother does not believe that an all-powerful, magical figure created everything in the universe and had a human son.” No one had to tell me this—I know my mother did not believe some magical figure was controlling the universe.

I spent a lot of time with the Langans growing up, and sure, I did not know Mark and Annette exactly like I knew my own parents—but I knew them pretty fucking well. Tom’s family was just like mine. Admittedly, they did attend mass more often than my family, which meant, I went to mass on Sundays with the Langans just as much as I went to church with my own family. But I spent a lot of time with the Langans. No one had to whisper into my ear, “Mr. and Mrs. Langan don’t really believe a magical figure controls the universe.” I spent every weekend with these good people. I knew they had the exact same rational abilities as me to understand the nature of the universe.

Therefore, as a young adolescent, every person who I knew in my life who was Catholic did not believe in the theology of Christianity. But the whole performative nature of our religious practices displayed Christianity in its most appealing form. My family and the

²I use the adverb here fairly generously.

Langans were not going to church in some bad faith attempt to mislead our neighbors and disguise our true, grounded view of reality. We did not believe in any supernatural elements of the faith, but we were convinced that we wanted to strive to lead moral lives. The practice of religion in this humanist manner portrays the whole idea of religion far more positively than how I viewed other practitioners of Christianity. When I met someone who practiced Christianity in some Protestant form, I automatically assumed that these people practiced their religion because they did believe in God, not *despite their atheism* like the people in my life.

As I said from the start, I may have been overconfident as a child in how I generalized my own experiences onto everyone else, but you can at least understand how I formed these ideas about Catholicism. Everyone who I knew growing up who attended Catholic church was a true atheist at heart, so I believed everyone at church was just like my family or Tom's family. It was similar to being in a first-grade classroom. No one needed to tell me Santa Claus did not exist, and I did not have any less faith in the ability of my classmates to reason themselves to the same conclusion.

I share both of the prior examples, however, to set the stage for the real point of this section. Growing up as a child, I had this idea that all of my friends had the same goals in life. We wanted to play sports; we wanted to excel academically; and we wanted to date the cutest girl in the school. I thought that we were all the same. I did not realize until high school that I had it completely wrong.

Team Sports

I should probably preface the next statement by saying that I am the last person that anyone should take parenting advice from, but with that clearly stated, if you have a child, sign them up for team sports. Anything taught in individual sports is the exact opposite of what you want your child to learn. Let your child be on a team; let them work toward a goal with their teammates; let them learn leadership and accountability instead of teaching them to pursue their individual success. I am who I am today because I played basketball, on a team.

I explained in previous letters how our team would play in various leagues across the racially segregated city of Omaha, so let me this year explain how we would play tournaments in rural Nebraska and across the Midwest in general. You bond as a team when you travel together, but you also get life experiences you might not experience if you were not part of a team.

Growing up, my parents rarely drank alcohol. Sure, they would drink at holiday parties with family friends or at an occasional wedding reception, but outside of those rare circumstances, my parents really did not drink any alcohol. But when you are on a team trip with a group of boys and their parents in a small town in Nebraska, the group of parents will have only ever have one activity outside of cheering for their children at the games. In the evenings, you are all together as a group and the parents will undoubtedly be drinking at the hotel bar or wherever you go as a team.

Again, my parents did not really drink alcohol, so the only time I ever interacted with people who drank alcohol was on travel sports trips, and it was a culture shock. My parents did not drink alcohol: they only wanted to raise a family, working during the week and then going to our sporting events or taking us to movies on the weekend. And the Langans just reinforced all my beliefs about the world. They were good, decent people, devoting their lives to their children. So it was an incredible culture shock when I learned everyone else's parents were moral degenerates. These people were not singularly focused on raising a family. They sought their own enjoyment in life, and they did it in the loudest and most obnoxious way possible.

All They Ever Do

Growing up, I believed my friends and I had the same three ambitions in life: sports, academics, and women. It was only at the beginning of high school that I learned I had been completely fooled. My friends had acted like they had the exact same ambitions as me, but then I learned the truth. We had the same experiences growing up. We had all been in those hotel bars. We had been to those holiday parties and wedding receptions. But somehow each of my friends had come away from all of those experiences with a complete different reaction than me, apparently concluding to themselves that they wanted to be just like all the middle-aged inebriated people we have come across in our lives.

Of course, they did not explain it in those terms. They did not say, "Let's get a case of beer so we can be cool like our parents." But they did not have to: I heard exactly what they were saying. I did not drink alcohol once during high school. I did not drink alcohol during college, and I have never drunk alcohol to this day.

To my friends' credit, they have always known the reason that I did not drink alcohol with them. They understood that my avoidance of alcohol was a deeply-rooted personal belief that people who drink alcohol lack the clarity of purpose that I seek in my life. My friends understood that I simply did not respect people who drank alcohol, whether it was some lame old person or whether it was an annoying classmate who went to school with us.

Part III

Lawrence, Kansas

Let us return to the present year, to the middle of April, on our second conference road trip of the year. We had made the trip down the Kansas Turnpike to Lawrence, and we are sitting there with our whole crew on the bleachers at Hogleund Ballpark, when a woman who is about my mother's age comes up to us in the stands, exclaiming, "Do you remember me?" It is hard to tell if my mother really remembered her, as knowing my mother, I am sure she would have responded the way she did regardless, exclaiming "Of course." The woman, perhaps suspecting the answer might have been a polite lie, proceeded to explain her identity. Her daughter was my youngest sister's volleyball coach. When she gave this introduction, I absolutely did remember her. Because then she gave the real reason she knew our family: *"We used to see you all the time at the movie theater."*

As I said from the start, we were at the ballpark with our entire crew, which if you know us, is quite the handful. But my mother politely carries the conversation with this former patron of Village Pointe Cinema. She tells her how we go to all the games to watch my brother-in-law's baseball team. She tells her how my youngest sister is a lawyer and how she is engaged to be married. Realizing then that she had mentioned my sisters' spouses, she adds, as only a mother would, "Of course, Joe here never wants to get married."

Regular readers of these letters recognize the outrageousness of my mother's aside. It is true that I do not want to get married, but my mother is feigning her indifference on the matter. Readers of the letter know that if there was ever a situation where she was asked to speak or forever hold her peace, she would bring the ceremony to an abrupt halt.

Aside from it concealing my mother's feelings on the subject, there are two main issues with the comment. First, while it is true that I do not want to get married, the proximate cause of my marital status is clearly that there are no women who want to get married to me. If there was some nonzero number of women who would readily accept a marriage proposal from me, then, while still unnecessary, it would at least be accurate to attribute my marital status to my opposition to the institution. But as long as there is no one who would even entertain the question, it does seem disingenuous to explain the situation in this manner.

But second, and more to the point, if you tell someone that your forty-year-old, and clearly heterosexual, son is not married because they do not want to get married, all they are ever going to hear is that your son is an incel. And of all the misrepresentations my mother makes, this is the one that is the furthest from the truth.

And May It Please The Court

“You see it’s like a portmanteau—there are two meanings packed up into one word.”

– Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass*

Readers are probably familiar with the term, but we will start with the definition in any case. *Incel* is a classic portmanteau of the words *involuntary* and *celibate*. It is used to describe a man who wants to have sexual relations with a woman but who is unable to find a willing partner. And before you say, “Well, case closed,” please allow me to present the full case.

The principal facts of the case are well known. I had a girlfriend when I was in seventh grade. Many people will disregard this relationship, but it does establish the basic elements of the charge. I have always been interested in women. Since seventh grade, I have unsuccessfully pursued romantic relationships with women. And everyone knows that I would be lying if I tried to argue that my efforts were somehow half-hearted. I have vigorously pursued romantic relationships, and since seventh grade, I have been wholly unsuccessful.

But here it is essential that you understand our society and the misogyny that permeates through it. In our society, when a man is consistently rebuffed romantically, he typically embraces the misogyny of our society as a character trait. The man feels wronged by society and by women in general. He feels that he deserves to be in a relationship and that he is unfairly denied even an opportunity to engage in such a relationship. And we, as a society, appropriate call him an incel.

And that is not me. I have never been wronged by society in my life. Everything I have ever experienced in the first forty years of my life has been laid out in a way that seems designed to cause me to succeed in all of my ambitions. As far as women in particular, I have never been treated unfairly.³ Every woman who has decided that she did not want to pursue a romantic relationship with me has either decided that she had better options available or that she preferred not pursuing a relationship at all. But I have never wallowed in my inability to find a romantic partner. My response is never to blame a woman for making the decision that seems best to her. My response has only ever been to reflect on how I could make myself more attractive as an option to succeed in the future.

I am not an incel, and if you are asking what relief exactly I am seeking in this case, it is quite simple. Do not tell anyone that I am against marriage or any other euphemism you can think of for being an incel. Describe the situation accurately. If you have to explain to anyone why I do not have a romantic partner, tell them I have no *rizz*. That seems like the most accurate way to describe my situation. But at the same time, I do feel like I have tailwinds at my back. I feel that I am being propelled forward to achieve all my goals, and so I think that you should also be mentally preparing yourself to have to explain any new developments on this subject with the exact opposite explanation.

³Readers might wonder about the night I was cursed by an evil witch, but let’s be real: every memory I have from the night in question is a good one.

The Direct Case Against Marriage

Most people who personally oppose the idea of marriage will only make the indirect case: they will explain all the negative features of marriage. I, however, will present the positive, more ambitious case. Let me explain the direct benefits of remaining unwed.

As we look at where we are today, on our fortieth birthday, having written a letter every year for the past fourteen years, everyone is able to judge for themselves how successful we have been in pursuing our goals. They will look and see that we traveled to Australia, and only my mother came with me. They will see that we traveled to France, and only my mother came with me. We traveled to the Bahamas, and while my younger sisters brought their romantic partners, I brought my mother and father. You can put that all together, and you can make your own judgment—just as my mother has.

But if I was married, what judgment could you make? That I had convinced one woman that what I have to offer is worth committing to for the rest of her life? Imagine a wife accompanied me to Australia, and then France, and then the Bahamas. It would not say she chose to travel the world with me three times in a row. It would say that I gave her the consideration⁴ of agreeing to be her partner for the rest of my life and that she reciprocated a similar consideration. It would say nothing about the attractiveness of traveling the world by my side.

As long as I remain unwed, everyone is able to make their own judgments as I continue to pursue my life. If a woman, who is under no contractual obligation to do anything with me, decides on her own to travel with me, it will say something. Do not get me wrong: it would not say much. Even someone with the least amount of rizz imaginable might be able to convince one woman to take one foreign trip with him.⁵ But what if, after returning from that trip, she said she wanted to go on the next one? Or what if she had her fill, but a different woman said, “Hey, if there is a spot open, count me in.” At some point, it will start to say something.

“For better or for worse, in sickness and in health, for richer or for poorer” sounds like the most incel-type shit that I have ever heard. Let me stand on my own two feet, and let every woman decide on her own, in perpetuity, if she wants to spend her time with me. No woman owes me anything. If she wants to make her decision based on how wealthy or how healthy her perspective suitors are, let her make that decision every day. If she has a better option instead of a worse option, she should go for it. And yes, I understand that no woman, save for when I was in seventh grade, has decided that I was the best option, but I remain confident in my own charisma and abilities, and I welcome the opportunity to be judged accordingly.

⁴According to Cornell Law School, consideration is a promise, performance, or forbearance bargained by a promisor in exchange for their promise.

⁵Did I mention that we travel to Japan with a party of *three*?

Tailwinds at Forty

If we look back through all of our past letters, the overarching theme is unabashed ambition. We want to do big things that no one else is even attempting to accomplish, and we want to do it in a way that makes it look so easy that everyone questions why they are not pursuing the exact same goals. As I write this letter at the age of forty, our ambitions appear larger and broader than they have at any point in the past.

Despite everything that you might have read so far in the letter, the thing that I want to do most in my life is travel around the world solo. It does happen, however, that a very close second is traveling the world with my mother or a beautiful woman. I want to solo-travel all over the world, but I am going to continue to do it a way where I tell you long in-advance when and where we are going, and you are more than welcome to book your travel along with me. No one else is inviting you on multiple foreign trips every year.

Aside from travel, I am pursuing a bachelor's degree in English literature. I may have turned forty years old, but in a lot of ways, I have much more in common with my twenty-year-old college peers than my peers from school twenty years ago. My young peers at school, for the most part, lack any real responsibilities in their lives. They do not have a mortgage or a spouse. They are just pursuing their lives to the fullest, and I am basically the same.⁶ And here is another thing that makes me similar to my young classmates: once I get my degree in English, we move on to the next goal. I think some people might mistakenly view this pursuit of an English literature degree as some item on my bucket list. I am not lame, and I do not have a bucket list. This English degree is only a stepping stone for what we want to pursue next—just like my young peers.

As a family, we pursue a grand ambition every year—to make a trip to *checks notes* Omaha, Nebraska. We pour our blood, sweat, and tears into the season for four months every year. No one roots for the team like my mother, but everyone is behind the effort. If they are not at the games with my sister and me, then they are logging into my ESPN+ account and watching the game from home. We attended twenty-one games this year, including five in the state of Texas.

We continue to purchase shares of great American corporations every month. There is no doubt that we face an existential crisis from re-electing the greatest threat to our republic since perhaps the civil war, but if we do have an election in three years, the threat of the collapse of western society should be abated. Nevertheless, we continue to purchase shares every month, and we keep our commitment to never sell the shares we have already purchased. We are invested in the future of America, and the only way we do not succeed is if the country itself fails. Moreover, we do not “invest” in speculative assets that offer society no benefit, like cryptocurrency.

In every respect, our goals for the future are more ambitious than they have ever been in the first forty years of our life. As we have always done, I set the path for where we are

⁶Probably the main difference is that I have a 401(k).

going, and I warmly invite you to join us on the journey. We have room for everyone in the family, as we did when we set out for the Bahamas this past year. We have room for a woman to join us, whether she is joining us for the first time or whether we met back in seventh grade. We have room for Josh. We have room for everyone, but we wait for no one. We are being propelled forward, in part from our good luck and fortune, and in part from everything we have built in the past forty years, and these tailwinds push us to achieving all of our goals.

Appendix A. Complete List of Annual Letters

- 2012 – “Letter to Shareholders”
- 2013 – “Wealth and a Purpose for Wealth”
- 2014 – “The Flower and Fruit of a Man”
- 2015 – “Burdened”
- 2016 – “Seventh Grade Prophecy”
- 2017 – “In Love with a Smarter Woman”
- 2018 – “Two Kinds of People in the World”
- 2019 – “The Most Indispensable Man in West Omaha”
- 2020 – “Day One”
- 2021 – “Lord of Village Pointe Cinema”
- 2022 – “Enduring Advantages”
- 2023 – “Back in the Kitchen”
- 2024 – “Une Lettre de France”
- 2025 – “Tailwinds at Forty”

Appendix B. Complete Portfolio Goal

First published in 2024, this list is our investment portfolio goal. We have not completed acquiring these shares yet, but we continue to make progress toward achieving this portfolio goal. In 2024, the overall size of the portfolio was \$1,999,681 with an annual dividend of \$23,430. The table below shows the present value, as of June 30th, of our portfolio goal. The present value represents a 20.2% increase in the overall size of the portfolio and a 8.1% increase in the annual dividend since 2024.

Equity	Quantity	Price	Dividend	Market Value
Fidelity 500 Index Fund	3000	216.11	2.39	\$648,330
Amazon.com, Inc.	1500	219.39	0.00	\$329,085
JPMorgan Chase & Co.	1000	289.91	5.60	\$289,910
Mastercard Inc	500	561.94	3.04	\$280,970
Berkshire Hathaway Inc.	500	485.77	0.00	\$242,885
Visa Inc	500	355.05	2.36	\$177,525
The Coca-Cola Co.	2000	70.75	2.04	\$141,500
Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.	1000	97.78	0.94	\$97,780
Microsoft	100	497.41	3.32	\$49,741
Wells Fargo & Co	500	80.12	1.60	\$40,060
Chevron Corporation	200	143.19	6.84	\$28,638
PepsiCo, Inc.	200	132.04	5.69	\$26,408
Bank of America Corp	500	47.32	1.04	\$23,660
Starbucks Corporation	200	91.63	2.44	\$18,326
Occidental Petroleum	200	42.01	0.96	\$8,402
Total			\$25,328	\$2,403,220

Appendix C. Australia 2023

On Friday, August 18, 2023, we arrived at Sydney Airport at 6:35am. We took the train from the airport to Circular Quay and checked into our hotel early, the Sydney Harbour Marriott. They did not have our Harbour Bridge room ready, but they offered us an Opera House room that was ready for an extra \$50 per night. It was worth it after the long flight, and the view wasn't bad either. After cleaning up, we took the ferry from Circular Quay to Milsons Point. From there, we took some pictures and then walked back across the Harbour Bridge. After getting back, we took the next ferry from Circular Quay to Manly. We walked the Corso, stopping at Manly Ocean Foods for some takeaway fish and chips, and then sat down at Manly Beach and ate our lunch. After enjoying a few more sights in Manly, we took the ferry back. To end the day, we walked through the Royal Botanic Garden and around the Opera House.

On Saturday, we ate breakfast at City Extra on the Circular Quay Wharf. Then we took the ferry to Watsons Bay. From there, we made the Coastal Cliff Walk until we got to the Dudley Page Reserve. Then we took the bus the rest of the way to Bondi Beach. After enjoying the beach, we took the bus to the train station and then a couple trains back to Circular Quay. In the evening, we took the light rail to Chinatown and walked to Tumbalong Park. Right next to the park we ate at Harajuka Gyoza. After dinner, we checked out the FIFA Fan Festival at Tumbalong Park before taking the light rail back to the hotel and watching the third place game on TV.

On Sunday, we made a 9am reservation for breakfast at Zimzala in Cronulla, which meant we needed to wake up early for the one-hour train ride to Cronulla. You might think we were being extra for taking a one-hour train ride to get breakfast, but even if it were two hours away we would have made the journey and then praised God for our faith because we were rewarded with the greatest breakfast of my life. Cronulla is a vibe, and if you don't go while you are in Sydney, you have missed out. After we got back, we still had plenty of time before the Final, so we caught the ferry to Manly and laid on the beach. Be warned if you are taking the ferry to Manly on the weekend that there is going to be a queue. As with breakfast, it was well worth the wait. On our way back from Manly, we stopped at the McDonald's in Circular Quay for a quick dinner before going to the game. We took the train to Stadium Australia and watched the World Cup Final between England and Spain. The crowd was overwhelmingly in favor of England (as were we), but the outnumbered Spanish fans were able to get the "Ole, Ole, Ole" chant going every time Spain had possession anywhere near the final third. As I said, I was rooting for England, but I could not help but enjoy seeing Olga Carmona score the game winner in the Final. Olga Carmona is one of my favorite European footballers in the same way Louisa Necib was one of my favorite European footballers over a decade ago.

On Monday, we took the train to Katoomba to see the Blue Mountains. It is a two-hour trip. Once we arrived in Katoomba, we caught a bus to the Echo Point lookout. From here, you get an excellent view of the Three Sisters and the rest of the Blue Mountains. We hopped back on the bus and headed toward Scenic World. Scenic World offers a rail and

cable car to descend to the bottom of the rainforest. If you plan to hike over and climb the Giant Stairway, it probably makes sense. If not, I think you can skip this tourist trap. Echo Point was the highlight of the Blue Mountains for us, however. We caught the train back to Sydney, and then we took the ferry to Manly to have dinner at the beachside Manly Grill.

On Tuesday, I took a morning walk along the harbor to Barangaroo Reserve. It was the nicest day of our entire trip, so of course we hopped on the bus and headed back to Bondi Beach. I swam in the ocean for 20 minutes, and then we laid on the beach the rest of the afternoon. It should be noted that every day of our trip we either visited Bondi Beach or Manly Beach. Which is the best beach in Sydney? It is hard to say. Manly has a lot to offer. The ride is iconic as you hop on the ferry and it takes you directly to Manly. You walk off the ferry and you have a bustling outdoor mall with any number of options for food or ice cream. And directly on the other side of the mall is the longest stretch of pristine beach that you could imagine. But then there is Bondi. It is a little more rugged to get there as the only way there is by bus, but honestly, I think it adds to the charm. You hop on the bus, and it lets you off right at the beach. The beach is not as long as Manly, but it is much wider. Honestly, it feels like a coin toss if you had to pick the best beach, but I think I am kind of partial to Bondi. After soaking in the sun, we walked along the coast before taking the bus back to Circular Quay. We had dinner at Rossini on the Circular Quay Wharf, and then we went to the Opera House to watch *Miss Saigon*.

On our last day in Sydney, I made a reservation for a walking tour through the historic neighborhood the Rocks for my mother. As you can expect, the tour guide was a personable older man and we enjoyed the tour. The main idea of the tour, however, can be summarized with these three main ideas. Number One: convicts and sailors and anyone else who ended up in Australia had a very tough go of it, often times due to unscrupulous profiteers. Number Two: large expenses by the government supported the engineering and architectural achievements in Australia. And Number Three: for the most part, Australia has done a good job of preserving the historic parts of Sydney. After the tour, the weather for the rest of the day was not the greatest. We took the ferry to Manly and walked along the northern coast, and then we returned to Circular Quay and ate at Searock Grill between the wharf and the Opera House.

On Thursday, August 24, 2023, we departed Sydney Airport at 9:25am and finally landed back in Omaha at 9:10pm.

Appendix D. France 2024

On Friday, August 2, 2024, after arriving in France, we took the train to Gare de Lyon and dropped off our luggage in a locker. We took the subway to Trocadéro to see the Eiffel Tower. We walked across Pont de Bir-Hakeim, and then took the subway to the Champs-Élysées. We walked down the Champs-Élysées, having to take a detour around Place de la Concorde until we reached the Louvre. From the Louvre, we took the subway back to Gare de Lyon, collected our luggage, and took the train to Lyon. After checking into our hotel, we ate dinner at Brasserie de la Bourse du Travail.

On Saturday, we woke up early to take the train from Lyon Part Dieu to go back to Paris for the Olympic quarterfinal in women's football between the United States and Japan. An extra-time goal by Trinity Rodman gave the US a 1-0 victory. We took the subway back from Parc des Princes to Gare de Lyon and then the train back to Lyon. We had dinner at La Squadra.

For our last day in France, we explored Lyon. We took the subway to Vieux-Lyon, and then the funicular up to the Basilica of Notre-Dame de Fourvière. From here, we had an amazing view of the entire city. We walked through Parc des Hauteurs to the ancient Roman theatre. From here, we walked all the way down to Vieux-Lyon and wandered through the streets of "Old Lyon." We took the subway to the Musée des Beaux-Arts to see four works by Eugène Delacroix: *Woman Stroking a Parrot*, *Murder of the Bishop of Liege*, *The Bride of Abydos*, and *Last Words of Emperor Marcus Aurelius*. After a short respite at the hotel, we took a one-hour cruise on the Saône, with views of Vieux-Lyon down to the Confluence. When we got off the cruise, we walked across the Passerelle du Palais de Justice and took the subway from Vieux Lyon back to our hotel.

Appendix E. Bahamas 2024

On Saturday, December 21, 2024, I flew with my mother and father from Omaha to Charlotte and then from Charlotte to Miami. In the Miami airport, we met my brother and we flew to Exuma. When we arrived, we stepped off the plane and walked to a very small building housing immigration and customs. Before we could enter the building, we heard my sister and her boyfriend yelling at us from the road on the other side of the fence. They had already landed and acquired our two rental vans. We showed our passports, collected our luggage, and affirmed we did not bring any alcohol or weapons with us. We stepped out of this very small building and my sister handed us the keys to the second van. We had some time to kill. We could not check into vacation rental for a couple of hours, so we had planned to get lunch. My sister looked up a restaurant on Google, but when we arrived, they were closed (seemingly permanently). We looked up another restaurant. When we arrived, it looked like a very sketchy bar. We decided on a third restaurant, which looked very nice when we arrived, so we ate at Augusta Bay. I had a burger, and it was great. Everyone's food looked great. We enjoyed our first meal on the island with a perfect view of the ocean. After lunch, we continued on the Queen's Highway to the Exuma Market. I should give some explanation about Exuma. There is really only one road on the entire island, the Queen's Highway. There are no traffic lights at all on the island, and the only stop sign on the Queen's Highway is the turn off into Georgetown, which is a one-way street that loops back onto the Queen's Highway. So we took the small loop into Georgetown to stop at Exuma Market. We had made an online order before leaving the states. After picking up most of our order (a number of items were out of stock or could only be partially filled), we continued on the Queen's Highway to our vacation rental. Here is some more explanation of Exuma – there are two main islands. The main island is Great Exuma. Great Exuma, however, is connected by a one lane bridge to a smaller island, Little Exuma. Our vacation rental was on Little Exuma. The entire trip from the airport to our vacation rental is 45 minutes. The Queen's Highway runs the length of both of these narrow islands, and the highway ranges from one to two lanes throughout its entire length, and it is riddled with serious potholes anywhere past Georgetown. The speed limit is 30 miles per hour on the entire "highway" to account for the numerous curves, the endless potholes, and the fact that the road is not typically a full two lanes. You also drive on the left in the Bahamas. But after the harrowing first drive on to our vacation rental, The Exuma Outpost, we arrived at an amazing house on an amazing beach. The house boasts five rooms that each have its own private bathroom. It has a large great room with a two story ceiling, a large kitchen, and a loft above the kitchen with two more twin beds. The house comfortably fits 12, so it was perfect for our large family. The house has a pool right in front of the main entrance, and then directly in the back is a lanai with seating for 8 plus two hammocks overlooking its basically private beach. There are four vacation homes on this basically private beach. After dropping off the groceries and taking a quick peak at the home and beach, my brother and I took the vans back to the airport to pick up the last members of our party to arrive, my sister and her family.

On Sunday, It was an early morning. We booked a private half day boat tour with Exuma Water Sports. With our large group, the cost was basically the same between the public tour

and the private tour, so the decision was obvious. They offer two choices of tours. If you have heard of Exuma before, you may be familiar with one of its big attractions – swimming with pigs. So one of their tours takes you to the beach where the pigs swim, but we chose the second option – their seven beaches tour. We easily made the correct choice. The first stop was an amazing sandbar near Rolletown where we got off and walked in the middle of the ocean and took pictures. Then we stopped at a beach at the end of Great Exuma where the tide created a natural lazy river between the two islands, so we took noodle floats and floated around the beach. The third stop was the nicest beach in all of Exuma. My family would argue our beach at the vacation rental was the nicest on the island, but they are delusional. This beach at the Moriah Harbour Cay National Park was the best – and we had it all to ourselves. The only way to visit this national park is by boat – and our boat was a private tour, so we had the entire beach to ourselves. On the way to the fourth stop we stopped in the ocean when we spotted some dolphins passing by. The fourth stop was a spot for snorkeling. I snorkeled for a bit until I dropped my snorkel. My sister’s boyfriend showed off his diving skills by retrieving my snorkel 15 feet down. The fifth stop was a spot for finding sand dollars, which the kids did, but at this point we had broken out the left-over skewers that we brought along with the cooler of beverages provided by the Exuma Water Sports tour. If you visit Exuma, book the tour.

On Monday, we spent day 3 at our beach. We went into town and picked up food from a food truck.

In the morning on Tuesday, we set out further down the Queen’s Highway down to the Tropic of Cancer Beach. The road there was even worse than we had experienced so far, but we made it, and it’s the longest beach in Exuma. In the afternoon, we headed into Georgetown to take a water taxi across to Stocking Island. At Stocking Island, we ate at the Chat n’ Chill, before taking the taxi back to Georgetown.

On Christmas, we spent the day at our own beach, and in the evening, a chef came over and cooked us dinner at the vacation rental. The menu was pork loin, grouper, mashed sweet potatoes, salad, fruit, and bread pudding.

On Thursday, we spent another day enjoying our beach.

On Friday, after enjoying the beach all day, we had reservations for a restaurant in Rolletown for our last night in Exuma. We ate at Blu. The food, the atmosphere, the live music, the dominatrix waitress – all of it was amazing. It was the perfect end to our stay in the Bahamas.

On Saturday, we loaded up both vans and took our final trip on the Queen’s Highway back to the airport. Our flight was for three hours, but we made it out to Charlotte, and then back to Omaha.