December 1, 2025

It has been fourteen years since I last wrote one of these letters. So much has happened since then, so it is time for one now. I am writing this letter in Brasília, Brazil, as that is where I am living now. Let me recap what has happened since the last letter, and how I got to where I am now.

We visited my mom and uncle in Spokane in the summer of 2011. We sold our previous house in DC, which we had been renting. Emma and I had flights booked to visit my mom and uncle again the next summer. A few days before the flight my uncle died. The memorial service got scheduled for a month later. I arranged to work remotely from there and changed our return flights. I rented a small fully furnished place for a month. It had internet access so I was able to work from there. After a while, Ge found a day-care where I leave Emma for a while during the day. We went to dinner with my mom every evening at her retirement facility. My mom loved that. Ge flew out for the memorial service and we all flew home together. We visited my mom Thanksgiving of 2013, and then the summer of 2014.



Emma with her grandmother



Emma playing with her diaper rash cream



Emma with her grandmother

We used the money we made from selling the rental house to do an addition and total gut renovation of our house. We had to move out of the house for a year and a half. We bought a townhouse near my work office to live in during the renovation, but Ge changed her mind so we ended up renting an apartment near the house in DC. We ended up using the townhouse for storage for all of our stuff. We started construction on the house in August 2014, right as we made our trip to see my mom. Because we were busy with the construction we did not visit my mom the summer of 2015. My mom died in October of 2015. It was pretty quick, so I was not able to see her before she passed. We finished the house in the summer of 2016.

In May of 2016 we all flew to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. I stayed for a couple of weeks, Ge and Emma stayed for the summer. For spring break 2017 Emma and I went to Southern California to visit friends and family, and to go to Disneyland. We also visited where my dad's remains are, at Fort Rosecrans in San Diego. Ge and Emma spent the next summer in Rio, also. Then for spring break 2018 Emma and I flew to SoCal again. We went to Disneyland, Legoland and Universal Studios this time, with some beach time also.



Universal Studios



Disneyland



Universal Studios



Disneyland



Newport Beach with cousin Kenny





Legoland & Disneyland



Rio de Janeiro



Rio de Janeiro



Rio de Janeiro

In October 2018 we all went to New York City to see the statue of Balto in central park. Emma read the book about the sled dog in class. We all wanted to visit NYC, so it was a good excuse. Ge and Emma spent the summer in Brazil again. Emma and I went to SoCal for spring break 2019 again. We went to Universal Studios, Legoland and Disneyland again. We also went to the San Diego Zoo Safari Park and spent the night there. We had a great time. I submitted my dad to the Avenue of Heroes of Coronado, and he was accepted. The Avenue of Heroes is a military service recognition program sponsored by the City of Coronado. I made a quick trip to San Diego for the presentation in November of 2019. My cousins and a number of my friends from high school also attended. As part of it they hang posters of the recipients on the streets for six months. The program from the event is here: https://www.coronado.ca.us/DocumentCenter/View/8530/Group-10-Fall-2019-AOH-Program



Universal Studios



Corona del Mar



Feeding giraffe at Safari Park



Legoland



Legoland



Oceanside



Coronado



Disneyland



Statue of Balto

COVID put a stop to summers in Brazil and spring break in California. It also ended Emma's ballet and guitar lessons. Having everyone at home all the time pushed our marriage to the breaking point and I moved into our townhouse in Virginia. During the summer of 2021 I drove my car to Southern California for a month to visit friends and family. Emma and I did a bit of camping in 2021 and 2022. Ge and Emma went back to Brazil for the summer of 2022. I drove across the country and back that summer. I visited friends in Boise, ID. I drove around the whole Oregon coast. I visited my niece and her two children in Coos Bay, OR. I visited my cousin in Santa Rosa, CA. Then I visited friends and another cousin in Costa Mesa, CA. In October of 2022 Emma and I drove up to the new Legoland in upstate New York. Emma loves Legoland. We stopped by New York city on the way home. For winter break 2022/3 Emma and I went to Baja California. We started with Cabo San Lucas, then went to Los Barriles. I got to show Emma my parent's old house there. We visited the cemetery where my brother is buried, but we could not find his grave. In March 2023 I did a work trip to Denver. While I was there I visited with my friend Stephan. We also made a trip to La Paz. Ge and Emma spent the summer of 2023 in Rio again.



Legoland New York



The Met, NYC



Backyard in DC



Cabo San Lucas



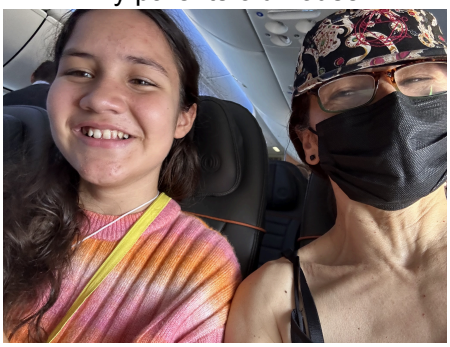
My parents old house



Hiked to an oasis



Los Barriles



Flight to Brazil



Rio de Janeiro

Emma's school in DC has an exchange program with a high school in Paris, France. Emma went there for a week in March, 2024. It ended right before spring break, so I flew over and joined her. We rented an AirBnb and pretended to be Parisians. In April I took a trip down to Miami to visit with my friends Robert and Stephan. Emma finished 8th grade in June of 2024, done with middle school. She took Chinese language class for two years at school, and they arranged a trip to Taiwan for the students right after school finished. It was a two week trip. Ge flew to Taiwan to join her at the end. After touring Taiwan some, they went to China, visiting Hong Kong, Shenzhen, Guangzhou, Kunming, Chengdu, Xi'an, Huangshan City, Shanghai and Beijing. My friend Paul moved to Newport, OR. In September I flew out to visit him for a week.



Paris



China



Paris



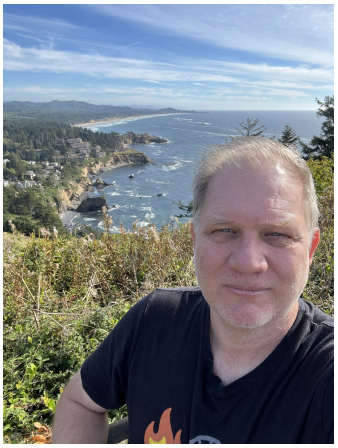
8th grade graduation



Paris



Disney Paris



Otter Rock, OR



China



Camping in MD



Taiwan



Miami, FL with
Robert and Stephan



Paris



Paris

I took Emma skiing for her first time at a local ski area in January, 2025. She did really well, and we both had a great time. Right after that we drove down to Florida. We went to Legoland and Disney World in Orlando. We drove down to Miami and visited my friend Robert. We then took the auto-train back to DC.



Skiing in VA



Waiting for the autotrain



Art Museum in Miami



Disney World



South Beach, Miami



Skiing in VA



Legoland Orlando

Emma started going to school at one year old. First it was a program called “Cooperative Play”, it was twice a week, half a day. The next year was the same thing, but it was more days per week. Then she did pre-K for two years. For kindergarten we put her in a French immersion program. That program ended, so we put her in the French International School (Lycée Rochambeau). After third grade we moved her to the Washington International School (WIS). It is an International Baccalaureate (IB), and also a French immersion school. And now, Emma is in Brazil at the American School of Brasília.

Emma and I have been here since this summer. She is going to school here now, and I am here to take care of her. How did we get here? Well, that is a little hard to explain, but I will try. Emma was finishing 9th grade. We had become bothered by the administration and some of the teachers at her school. Emma had shown her desires to be more in the realm of art and not science, and her school was very STEM oriented. So, we decided it was time for a change. Gisleide felt that Emma would do better in Brazil. She thought the culture would be more supportive and Emma could visit with her relatives here. We found a school in Brasília that follows the IB program, so she could continue with that program. It also has better support for the arts, and the city is where most of Ge’s relatives live. The plan was that Ge and Emma would move to Brazil, but the situation changed. I was laid off from work in a RIF, and instead of looking for a new job I decided to retire. With the current state of immigration enforcement Ge does not want to leave the country, for fear of not being able to get back in. She has valid

permanent residency (green card), but that does not guarantee anything right now. Brazil, on the other hand, welcomes the parents of its citizens. Since Emma is Brazilian, I was able to get temporary residency. So, I am the one that has moved to Brazil as her guardian.

We arrived here July 17th so that we would have time to get set up here before school started. Emma's school follows the northern hemisphere, so school starts in August. The school is on a year round schedule, so it started on August 4th. I got to work on renting an apartment near the school, but that is not an easy task here in Brasília. You either have to have a cosigner or put a very large deposit down, which worked out to be about seven months worth of rent. Ge's aunt and uncle cosigned for us. There was so much paperwork for that. Also, the minimum duration of a lease is 30 months. We plan on being here for three years, so that was not a problem. It took us over three weeks before we moved in. We stayed at three different AirBnbs until then. The other thing about apartments here is they don't have appliances. So, we had to buy a refrigerator and washing machine to go with all the furniture. The apartment did have a range. I could not open a bank account here until I got my residency ID card. That took more than a month. I could not get a local cell phone account without my ID also, so I ended up getting a prepaid number. The bank required a phone number, and it had to be local.

Here are some of my observations of Brasília and of Brazil. The city was created from nothing in the late 1950s, and the capital was moved from Rio de Janeiro to here. They created a federal district (DF), just like DC is in the U.S., but it is much larger in size. The city was planned out to an extreme level, it is shaped like an airplane. The government buildings, museums and hotels are in the fuselage, while the residential areas are in the wings. The leading part of the wings are all apartment buildings, while the trailing part is townhouses. Single family houses are all located outside of the airplane. The airplane shape is called "plano piloto", or "pilot plan" in English. The wings are divided into quadras, and the quadras are divided into blocks. So, our address is SQS 405, bloco H, apt 305, Asa Sul, Brasília. Asa Sul means South Wing. The apartment buildings do not have rooms on the ground floor, they are all lifted up and supported by "pilotis". I think this is done as a style choice and also for security. Security is a big concern here. Almost every window has bars, and most fences have razor wire on top.



Our quadra in the city.
We are the red dot.



Our apartment building,
we are on the top floor



Our apartment building,
you can see the H on the side

A minority of the people live in plano piloto, the satellite cities hold the majority. They even have the bigger buildings. They are definitely not planned like plano piloto is. There is no new construction going on in plano piloto, as everything was built already and nothing can change. There are lots of repairs and renovations happening, but nothing new is being built.



Map showing the satellite cities



The city at night

We do not have a car, and do not plan on getting one. The city has a very extensive bus system which we have used a lot. I have an unexpected benefit, the ride is free for me since I am 60+ years old. I have been doing lots of walking also. The weather here is nice for walking. I have done so much that I have lost 16 pounds since arriving. I finally lost all my COVID weight gain. We arrived in the dead of winter, which is the dry season. It was over a month before we saw our first rain, and then almost another month before the second rain. I am told that the summer

months are the wet season where it rains nearly every day. The average high temperatures here do not fluctuate much during the year, having only a 6 degree F difference. Most days are in the mid 80s. The humidity is much lower here than other parts of Brazil, which I am grateful for. We do not have air conditioning in our apartment. The city is at 3500 feet above sea level, which helps keep the temperatures down. The climate is described as a tropical savanna climate. Much more information about the city can be found here:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bras%C3%ADlia

Brasília is a car based city. There is a small subway here, but it is very new. The city was designed to be driven. There are major roads that run the length of the wings on both the leading and trailing edges. There are three roads that run the length of the middle of the wings. The buses run up and down these major roads. They never cross the wing, so if you want to get across the wing you will either have to walk or take a long bus ride that circles the wings. The roads here are rough. There are patched potholes to make it rough, but the real problem is that the road was never smooth from the minute it was made. The cars here are different from those in the States. They are very small, and there are very few from the U.S. The most common cars I see are Fiat, VW, Renault. There are some Japanese brands, but the European ones are the most common. There are a number of BYD EVs from China, also. All the cars that are not EVs have stick shifts. Most cars do not have electric windows. Some will have electric in the front, and hand cranks in the back. There are very few pick-up trucks. This function is filled by small cars pulling light weight trailers. I see lots of cars that have tow hitches. SUVs do exist here, but there are not that many. There are two car ride services here, Uber and 99. 99 is much cheaper than Uber. We have ridden in the back of many cars since we have been here. The stop signs here are usually treated as a suggestion, so when walking you need to beware. There are very few cross walks, but the drivers let you cross when you are in one. If there is no cross walk, they will run you over. The way the roads are set up there are very few left turns. Usually you drive past the turn and then do a u-turn, then a right. This reduces the number of signals.

In the planned layout of the city there are commercial blocks every so often. In almost every one there is a grocery, drug store, lottery kiosk and veterinary clinic. Brazilians love their pets. In the layout there is a lot of open space with trees everywhere. All the trees here are different from the ones I am used to. So are the birds. I have seen no squirrels or rats here. There are lots of lizards. The city planners are not like the ones in the U.S., they do not only plant male trees, so there is lots of fruit on the ground that have fallen from the trees. There is less pollen also. There are lots of walkways throughout the city. It is really great for walking. McDonalds exists here, but it is a little bit different due to different preferences and lack of ingredients. Hamburgers are popular here, there are lots of hamburger restaurants, but they are a bit different. They have lots of secret sauce on them, so much that they are difficult to eat. It is a mayonnaise based sauce. Restaurants boast about their special house sauce. The milk here is all UHT (ultra-high temperature). I did find one store that sells fresh milk. They have peanut butter, but it is just ground peanuts, nothing else. They do like to add cocoa to it, though. We tried to make macarons, but we had a tough time finding the ingredients. After five stores I found the almond flour. I never could find powdered sugar, though. I bought some online, but it is not as finely ground as what I am used to.



Mango tree with fruit



The center main roads



Walkway under the main roads



Common collared lizard



Crested caracara



Buff-necked Ibis

Brazilian adoption of Americanisms is kind of funny. Right now the stores are advertising “Black Friday” sales, which is weird since they don’t have Thanksgiving here. Also, it is in English. Some change it to “Black November”. Then there is the “Novembro Black” sales, which makes it look more like Portuguese. It gets pretty absurd at that point. Since there is no Thanksgiving holiday they are in full Christmas mode in the middle of November, including Santa at the malls. Flip-flops are very popular here. Their name for them is Havaianas, which is Portuguese for Hawaiians. They have stores where that is the only thing they sell.

When Emma and I were in Paris she convinced me to start learning Portuguese on the Duolingo app. So, I have been doing that for about a year and a half. I am still at a very basic level, but am doing better than I ever did with Spanish. Emma speaks Portuguese fairly well, but her vocabulary is lacking some. She is taking a Portuguese class in school. Navigating getting us set up here was a bit of a challenge with my limited language skills. I have been using translation apps on my phone and computer quite a lot to get by.

Emma had a week off in the middle of October for Fall/Spring break, I guess. Ge really wanted to see Emma, so we flew up to DC. The trip was quite an ordeal. It was an overnight trip, and we had two stops going north and one on the way back. Emma got to see her friends there, so it was good for her. It was exhausting, though. Emma has just over four weeks off for Winter/Summer break. We will be going to DC during that time.



Emma with her cousin, aunt and grandmother



Emma at her school



Pontão do Lago Sul



Flip-flop (Havaianas) store



Overview of Emma's school



Lago Paranoá



Emma after being hit in the face with a dodgeball



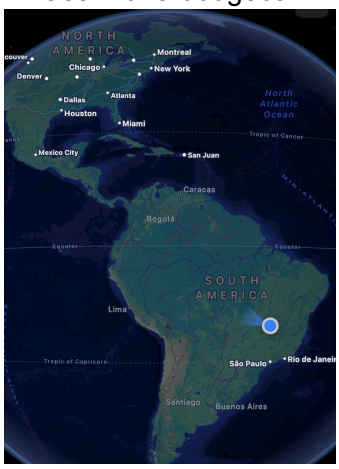
Juscelino Kubitschek Bridge



Local trees



Sidewalks of tile



Our location



Local trees



TV Tower



First day of school



Panoramic photo of our apartment before we moved in

Alex Kiefer