December 1, 2014

Dear Friends,

The tree is up. The advent calendar is open, and once again we wait anxiously for the coming of the Baby Jesus.

I try so hard to slow down. I try to look around and relish the magic and wonder that surrounds me. Life makes that a bit challenging at times. I often feel the treadmill is set at a pace and a hill way too difficult for me to endure. I know I'm not alone in that feeling. Yet somehow, the angels grab our shoulders and carry us all along.

Last week we were in Lenox Hill Hospital for Meghan to undergo emergency surgery, as a pea size hole in her artery, leaked 50ccs of blood into her knee joint. It was her 5th surgery on that knee. In May she spent a week in the hospital with severe gastritis, her body presumably decided her medication was too much – ironically, the same medication that was credited with controlling that AVM (arterioveous malformation) in her knee. And, in February she had a complete thyroidectomy- 19 nodules, three precancerous, necessitated it be removed in its entirety. The work to balance the body since then has been arduous.

Yet, she persists in ways that make me glow with pride. In the spring of 2013 she changed schools, and came to my school, where she graduated 5th grade in June 2014. This fall she began intermediate school, and finished the first marking period on the Principal's Honor Roll. She is on student council, participating in after school drama, and swimming as much as she can. She has joined the youth group at our new church, Castleton Hill Moravian, and went on her first retreat this fall. She is focused, and goal oriented, and appropriately stubborn, as I would want my independent young lady to be.

Meghan has begun to establish a platform, raising awareness and funds for our Cowden's Syndrome, and other rare diseases. In the summer she was nominated for the Global Genes Project Teen Advocacy Award. In July she was asked to throw out the first pitch at Staten Island Yankee Stadium. Last month, on my birthday, she received the "Kid of Achievement" award from the Staten Island Children's Museum. Her efforts continue, and she has begun to work on a fund raising breakfast, set for February of next year. She will not be stopped, and I think her drive is good for all of us.

Because, sometimes, our hearts hurt. And having a purpose is so necessary when putting one foot in front of the other is all you can manage. On December 4, 2013 my Dad lost a brief, fierce battle with pancreatic cancer, one of the meanest diseases I have ever witnessed. The pain of his loss was searing and I miss him every day. He had finally spent his last few years close to home working hard on personal healing. It seemed extra cruel to lose him, just as we were starting to find each other.

But, death is cruel to those of us left behind. And there have been more funerals this year than I care to count. Some young, some old, some expected, and some by surprise. All painful. In October we buried Grandma Gen, and in 10 months the Thompsons had suffered two major losses. Last week we buried my Uncle Jerry, (my Dad Ken's brother) and watched his wife and three young adult children say goodbye too soon. In just over 2 years the losses of GGPa and Jerry have been the source of deep pain for the Hansen family. The mass cards pile up. The prayers are said. But I have to admit, this year has at times rocked me to my core.

In the midst of the sadness we find time for celebration, because life needs to find a way to keep us going. Grandma and Pop continue to amaze, even through the challenges that being 94 and 95 present, their love and dedication to each other is amazing. Grandma Yo is tough as they come, and despite difficult times, she continues to be a light in our family. Mom and Ken, and Felix's Mom and Dad, support us unconditionally, as only parents can. We are very blessed.

This year, Felix earned his electrical license, a feat not to be taken lightly, and one that was never really properly celebrated as we seem to be living at warp speed. He maintains the patience of a saint as he watches the medical trials and tribulations we endure with nothing but strong support at all times.

I continue to teach math, in what is now my 18th year at PS30. I like my job. Although, I can't help but wish the classes were a bit smaller. I enjoy the atmosphere and count myself richly blessed to work for, and with such supportive people.

We feel disconnected from so many of you, and that was never the intention. Every life is busy, and we are acutely aware that every person, every house, every family, has their own relentless schedule.

We will close the year, in the fast paced month of December, with some goals to slow things down a little at home. We will try and spend some time near the tree, and to enjoy wrapping as a treat not a chore. We are going to try and spoil each other generously, and be generous to those less fortunate. We plan to keep perspective, and our sense of humor.

As we await the Baby Jesus, with eager anticipation, we will remember with our whole hearts that there is no promise of tomorrow on this earth.

And if you ever do want to follow the Ortegas, we are easy to find at www.beatingcowdens.com
Or drop us an email at felixoortega@verizon.net We ALWAYS love to hear from a friend.

To you and yours, we wish peace in your hearts and souls.

Warmly,

The Ortegas
Lori, Felix, Meghan, Allie and Lucky