

Dear Family and Friends,

Happy Holidays! It's that time of the year again to take stock and reflect on the past twelve months. And it has been a doozy to say the least! I am relishing in all the wonderful things that this year has brought, while equally happy and relieved that it is over and we *all* get a clean slate come January.



***On the Skybridge...heaven knows how many feet above land.***

After wrapping up my first year of college this Spring, mother and I took off on quite the trip around Southeast Asia. After four planes, we arrived on the island of Langkawi, Malaysia and stayed in Datai Bay which was named as one of National Geographic's top ten beaches in the world. It certainly lived up to the title.

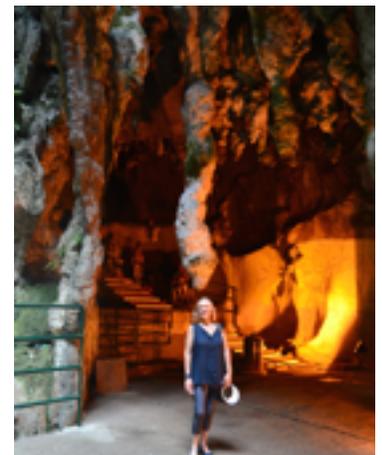
We had a few days of island adventures including Mangrove and GeoForrest boating, walking across the swaying, suspended skybridge and witnessing the most phenomenal sunrises and sunsets.



***Sunset on Datai Bay.***

We returned to mainland Malaysia and were reunited with some of my dear friends who hosted me during my gap year before college. It was an overwhelmingly positive experience to take my mother back and show her the Malaysia I know while also proving to myself that the country didn't conquer me. I even got a spontaneous twenty-four hour trip to Singapore to visit my best friend and former college roommate, Meggi! Showing up for friends is so important to me. I left my Mom in Malaysia with my "Auntie" Jenny whom she had just met and returned overnight to find that she had been introduced to the entire family, taken back to the village and experienced true Malaysian hospitality. This involves lots of people pushing you to eat as much food as possible. She quickly learned that "Makan" was the word for food and "Tak Boleh" meant literally can not.

Can not eat, said with a big smile, is a key survival skill in Malaysia! We had a great time in the town, Melacca, where I was hosted in 2012, walking around Jonker Street and running around sampling all the local food with all my "aunties." We made it back to Kuala Lumpur for a few days as well where we caught up with friends, fed elephants at a sanctuary, visited the Petronas Towers and went to the Batu Caves. I will say that my Mother took to Malaysia like a fish in water...everyone loved her!



***In Batu Caves, after many steps to ascend!***



***At Kuala Gandah***



**Royal Grand Palace**

Our next stop in our epic trek was Bangkok, Thailand where we met up with a group of fourteen other extraordinary characters and guide, Ray, who made this trip the magical and special experience it was! I could write a book about our fellow travelers and friends as describing them as characters is a massive understatement. We had a great time exploring the city, the floating markets, the ruins of Ayuthaya, the painful yet effective ways of Thai massage, the intricate Royal Grand Palace and monkey island (we were lucky to escape with all limbs in tact). I would highly recommend a visit to the restaurant Cabbage and Condoms if you ever find yourself in Bangkok. It is quite the innovative answer to addressing a social problem...and you get some quirky souvenirs for your friends!

Next, we found ourselves in Phnom Penh, Cambodia exploring the history that included a visit to the Killing Fields, Prison S21 and meeting Bou Meng, one of only two living survivors from the prison. I was quite overwhelmed to hear firsthand from a survivor of the atrocities of the Cambodian Genocide. We explored the vibrant city of Phnom Penh, taking a ox cart ride around the rice fields and visiting the Royal Grand Palace of Cambodia. Southeast Asia's architecture overall nails it in terms of opulence and grandeur.

A short plane ride took us to Siem Reap, Cambodia where we visited Angkor Watt that absolutely did not disappoint. The detail, history and sheer enormity of the ruins blew us away. Absolutely incredible to walk the sacred grounds and just be there. We also visited other ruins including Angkor Thom, Bantei Srei which is a tribute to women and Ta Prohm, most commonly known as the Lara Croft tomb. While fighting off the truly treacherous heat, we explored these ruins which for now, really remain open and free to the public without limitations. If you can fight off the fear of tourists, go to Siem Reap and soak in the history!



**Angkor Watt-standing on ledges!**



**Sunrise giving/collecting of alms.**

We had no idea that the trip could get any better, but it did! Our stop in Laos blew it absolutely out of the water. We loved Laos with all of our hearts and had the greatest time there, particularly in Luang Prabang, a town that is a UNESCO world heritage site where you can only get around in small, motorized tuk-tuk's. We spent our time exploring buddhist caves off the Mekong River, visiting villages that distill their own snake whiskey (amphibian included in bottle) and laughing with great friends over food. The highlight of our time there was giving alms (offerings) to the hundreds of monks that walk the streets at sunrise to collect for the

poor. You can give whatever you have and that morning we gave traditional sticky rice. All of Southeast Asia is visually very religious, but Luang Prabang has a sense of serenity and peace despite its difficult history that shakes you to your core. We spent a few days in Vientiane, a city with huge French influence and massages that compete with Thailand on the pain scale! One highlight was visiting COPE, a museum and recovery center dedicated to educating and helping those effected by land mines, which to this day are exploding and countless miles have yet to be cleared.

Our trip came to conclusion in Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon), Vietnam where we crawled through the Cu Chi tunnels, consumed traditional Pho like it was our job and ran around in the rain before saying goodbye to a trip that neither of us will ever forget. We returned to the States just in time for my favorite cousins Kathryn's bridal shower, a Bovet wedding, housesitting, babysitting, dog sitting and a road trip to Buena Vista and the Sand Dunes with Meggi and her sister. Sometimes I worry that I am turning into my Mother and doing too much, and then I realize I am already her so I shouldn't waste any more time worrying! Before I knew it, August had arrived and we officially welcomed Greg into the family as Kathryn married her longtime love whom both my mother and me adore! Welcome to the family Greg....you're in for a ride with us Olson's. It was a beautiful wedding as well as a family reunion.



***Sand Dunes National Park***



***At the top of Mt. Yale!***

I just wrapped up my first semester of my sophomore year at college. I am a Resident Advisor which has proven to be a responsibility on a level that I could have never have anticipated! Many life lessons learned from this job. I still don't know my major or life calling (do any of us?), but I am along for the ride and learning to enjoy the natural highs *and* lows that come with it all. College is a lot and the biggest lesson I have learned so far is that the friends you keep are truly what matters. Amongst the craziness that this semester has brought, I have managed to have a lot of fun really embracing the outdoors with frequent hikes up Chautauqua and summiting fourteeners; Mt. Bierstadt and Mt. Yale.

To celebrate our birthdays, we spent a weekend in October in Albuquerque, NM with my friend Meggi to see the hot air balloon festival. Our favorite Gallanter girl, Kayte, kindly hosted us and we had a blast! It is truly a sight to behold watching hundreds of balloons ascend at the break of dawn.

This semester has been quite the intense challenge for me for various reasons and I decided early to take a lighter work load to balance it. People don't like to talk about the hard times that life can bring, but I have discovered that most people are going through something or another and being the first to share often opens the door for some very meaningful conversations from all sides. In recent months I have also been working to complete my 200 hour yoga teacher certification. I adore yoga for both the physical and mental effects and encourage everyone to give it the old college try and attend a class! It is moving meditation.



**International Hot Air Balloon Festival**

My Mother has also had quite the year! Mother-daughter relationships are not always smooth sailing, but I consider myself so blessed to have such an extraordinary person as my mother and friend. This fall she made a trip back to the midwest for her college reunion (not supposed to say what number) and catchup with dear friends. When she is not sMOTHERING our cat Whisky (or me), she is actively running around and doing a millions things all at once (just like old times).

I will be heading out (as you read this) as an adult adoptee mentor on a trip taking Vietnamese adoptees and their families to their homeland as I did to China in 2004. I am very much looking forward to this trip and believe it will be the most meaningful trip I have been on so far.

Life is an immense gift that is made worthwhile by sharing it with dear family and friends like all of you. Time is always of the essence and the greatest gift we all have. Treasure it!

You can stay in touch with quips and photos from my travels and life (including more on our summer trip) on my website: [KailaInTheWorld.Com](http://KailaInTheWorld.Com).

We would love to hear from all of you, so never hesitate to call or email and have the most wonderful holiday season yet! The best is yet to come.

All of our love,

Kaila, Sheryl and Whisky  
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Our cat is not sophisticated enough to converse via email...she's trying.