

THE CLAYTON CHRONICLE

The Scottsdale Scoop

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FOUR CHRISTMASSES

We didn't see Vince Vaughn and Reese Witherspoon's latest film, *Four Christmases*, but our lives imitated their art this holiday season. We celebrated four separate Christmases over a 16-day period.

Family Christmas: We usually start celebrating Christmas on Christmas Eve, opening gifts from each other, plus any gifts that have arrived in the mail or from friends. This year, we were leaving home much earlier than normal, so we did family gifts on Sunday, December 14. It was a busy day, as we also delivered treats to Angie's visiting teachers, attended the Stake Christmas Devotional and had home teachers over.

London Christmas: Ken and Angie skipped buying gifts for each other and flew to London for a short trip.

They were only there four days, but they covered most of the highlights. We were only able to do this because we were going to be in Salt Lake for the holidays, and we knew the kids would be well cared for.

Utah Christmas: This is the only part of Christmas that actually took place on December 25. We stayed at Grandma & Grandpa Clayton's house, and the family all came over for sausage fondue and the family gift exchange. Chad, Jeff and Marnie were probably more involved than ever before in picking out gifts for their cousins.

Santa Christmas: We returned home on December 29 to find that Santa had visited while we were gone. He was kind enough to leave presents (not coal) for the whole family. Marnie was absolutely amazed and thrilled that he delivered presents while we were gone.



Waiting patiently (?) to open presents

father Christmas

While walking around London one evening, we kept seeing people walking in groups dressed as Father Christmas. There were all kinds of costumes: fat ones, skinny ones, both men and women, some in red, one even in black.

As we passed a pub, we saw that it was crammed full of hundreds of Father Christmases having a great time, and there were even more coming up from the tube station. A surreal sight.

snappy dresser

Angie was getting dressed to go to church, and she finished her outfit by putting on some very pointy black shoes she bought at the Corte Ingles in Tenerife.

Marnie made a trilling sound (a sound that means she likes what she sees) and commented: "Wow, Mom! You look like a fancy Mexican person!"

We're not sure what that means exactly.

add & subtract

Chad had a tooth filled in December. Soon thereafter, Jeff had a tooth extracted.

You win some, you lose some.

But if you're the dentist, I suppose you win on both of those.

LONDON TIMES

By Ken & Angie

DECEMBER 19-22

Most people wouldn't consider making a four-day trip to London (six with travel days), but we aren't most people. We are able to travel so inexpensively that it seems silly not to travel, and with some of our flight benefits expiring on December 31, we felt we *had* to go.

DAY ONE

We flew into London at 9:30 in the morning and headed for the West India Quay Marriott in Canary Wharf. Four trains later, we checked in and headed right back into the city. With only four days in a city this big, no naps allowed. After more trains and a walk along the Thames, our first stop was the Tower of London.



The Tower is the former residence of kings & queens for hundred of years. The current residents, retired military personnel called Beefeaters, give tours of the compound, including the courtyard where Anne Boleyn and others lost their heads. We also saw the crown jewels, many sets of armor (including Henry VIII's), and the White Tower. We saw where the princes' bodies were buried (presumably by their uncle and usurper, King Richard III) until their remains were discovered hundreds of years later.



Next we headed for St. Paul's Cathedral, which was unfortunately closed that afternoon (it's a shame when they close a perfectly good tourist attraction for a religious service). We moved on to the British Library (viewing original

manuscripts by Shakespeare, Jane Austen, John Lennon, and others, as well as some of the earliest Biblical codices anywhere). By the time we arrived at the British Museum the overnight flight caught up with us. We dragged ourselves past the Elgin Marbles and other incredible artifacts that we can't remember.

After an Italian dinner, we headed for the theater, where we saw *Les Miserables*. Angie slept through most of the first act and part of the second, but fortunately she knows the story.

DAY TWO

We took the tube to Westminster and emerged directly across the street from the clock tower that everybody calls Big Ben (it's actually called St. Stephen's tower; Big Ben is the bell inside the tower). We joined a "London Walk" that included history and information of the area around the Houses of Parliament and Westminster Abbey.



The walk and our guide Karen were so great that we hurried north to catch an afternoon walk in the Marylebone area, including the Hertford House and its collection of famous art as well as the church where Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning were married.

After the tour, we left the city for Epping, where we were invited to dinner at the Leverich house with friends the Leveriches (James, Jan, Bethany, Brian), Aaron Reeve, Heidi Bernhard-Bubb, and Steve & Tara Wellington. We visited for so long that we missed the last train to London, so James was kind enough to drive us back to our hotel.

DAY THREE

After Sacrament Meeting at the Whitechapel Ward, we met up with another walk touring parts of London that Shakespeare and Dickens would have known. Several hundred years have passed and fires have damaged the majority of London, but a few buildings and ruins remain, including a 2,000-year-old Roman wall and the foundation of Shakespeare's parish church. We also stood on the spot where 50,000 plague victims are buried (now a park) and saw where William Wallace (Braveheart) was drawn and quartered, which isn't as pleasant as it sounds.



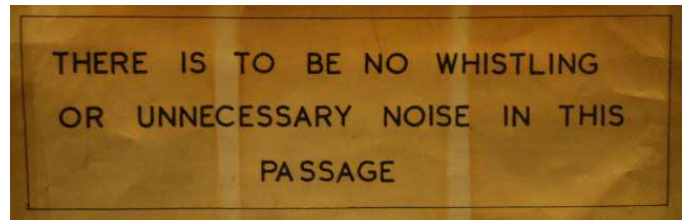
*The only proof that Ken was in London
(if you can tell it's him).*

We joined one more tour after dark, exploring parts of London that inspired Harry Potter. This was our least favorite tour, with much of it only loosely related to the books. We ended up on a Diagon Alley-like street near Leicester Square, where we ate Indian food before heading back to the hotel a little early (8:00 or 9:00).

DAY FOUR

Our last day in London started back at Westminster Abbey, only this time we went inside. We met up with our excellent guide, Tom, who spent two hours telling us the stories of the Abbey and showing us the best graves.

We met up with James Leverich, briefly touring the Victoria & Albert Museum and having a late lunch with him. Then we headed back to Westminster one last time.



*A sign outside Winston Churchill's office.
Every parent needs a similar sign.*

We spent way too much money on the Winston Churchill Museum, not because it was bad, but because we nearly sprinted through in order to make it back to the Abbey for an Evensong service.

Instead of taking the tube to our next stop, we took a long, indirect walk, attempting some night photography along the way. We strolled to Trafalgar Square to see the statue of Admiral Nelson, past the Admiralty Arch (and Captain Cook's statue)



and Buckingham Palace, and finally near Victoria Station. We ended the night at *Wicked*, the theatrical retelling of the Wizard of Oz story from the point of view of Elphaba (a.k.a. the Wicked Witch of the West). It was a beautiful theater and a great performance.

More on London Walks

We highly recommend London Walks to any fellow London travelers. Each walk is only £7 per person (£5 with discount card you can purchase); each tour is 2 hours long and has an expert guide showing you things you would normally just walk right past. You can find them at walks.com.

Old Westminster with Karen (an excellent guide)

Ken ★★★★★

Angie ★★★★★

Marylebone with Helena

Ken ★★

Angie ★★★

Shakespeare's & Dickens' London with David

Ken ★★★

Angie ★★★

The London that Inspired Harry Potter with Alan

Ken ★★½

Angie ★★

Westminster Abbey with Tom (our favorite guide)

Ken ★★★★★

Angie ★★★★★

CHRISTMAS REVIEW

By Chad, Jeff & Marnie DECEMBER 14-29

What gifts did you give the family?

Marnie – I got that jewelry for Mom. We both really like it. I got Dad a bunch of shirts from Old Navy. Chad got music, and Jeff got that survival book like what to do if you ever get stranded on an ice cube. Something like that.

Jeff – I bought Chad CDs because he had 140 on his wish list. I bought Marnie a Webkinz hippo and a slinky because she really wanted them. I got Mom a DVD and a CD. I bought Dad a book called *The Zero Game* by Brad Meltzer because he likes Brad Meltzer books.

Chad – I bought my maternal unit some nice headphones. My paternal unit received two CDs *Day and Age* and *August and Everything After*. I gave Jeffrey *Final Fantasy* for PSP because I hadn't played my copy for a few days after he took it. Marnie got an LPS turtle plush and LPS sticker-book (for in church).

What did you get for Family Christmas?

Marnie – I got a Littlest Pet Shop game for my DS. Jeff gave me a Webkinz hippo, which I called Christine. Chad gave me a Littlest Pet Shop turtle and sticker book. I also got a Princess alarm clock that isn't working any more and a Littlest Pet Shop fitness center.

Jeff – I got a K'nex roller coaster set and a Lego Indiana Jones set.

Chad – I got an awesome Green Lantern hoodie complete with mask, Loco Roco, Final Fantasy XII, and six CDs.

Which cousin's name did you draw and what did you get for him/her?

Marnie – I bought for Izzy. I got her warm clothes, socks and a hat. I picked that because I wanted her to stay warm, and it is cold in Utah. And because her mom told me she needed it.

Jeff – I got BJ. I got him a Webkinz monkey and a Diego Safari Rescue game for DS because I thought those would be the best gifts for his age and interests.

Chad – I bought for Evy and gave her Dora DVDs because Debi said she likes Dora. I figured it was a safe bet.

Which cousin drew your name?

Marnie – Izzy had my name just like I had hers. She got me Petz Dogs Fashion for my DS. Isabella made a very good choice or maybe it was Calli. Izzy is only three months old.

Jeff – I'm not sure whether it was Noah or Dax because Calli handed it to me and it didn't say. I got Mario Kart DS, which I love.

Chad – Alex drew my name. He gave me a cool Edgar Allan Poe book with pullout copies of letters and his only handwritten poem. He also gave me two CDs by The Who.

What did you get from Grandma & Grandpa?

Marnie – I know I got a DS case and a Tinker Bell game for DS and also a Tinker Bell movie. And guess which fairy I like the most. It's Rosetta because I like flowers.

Jeff – Two K'nex sets that are other carnival rides. I also got a time-delay Phlat ball.

Chad – A John Bytheway booklet and CD collection, We Ski game, Leven Thumps book and an underwater ski-board.

What did you do in SLC besides Christmas?

Marnie – I liked the big sleepover where all the cousins came to Grandma & Grandpa's house. There were 12 grandkids (Damien and Izzy didn't come). We watched a movie and ate pizza and had drinks. It was pretty fun.

Jeff – It was fun to stay at Alex and Raychel's house because of some of the games and also the delicious Santa Fe chicken tortillas.

Chad – I played four hours of basketball with my friends from our old ward. I played pretty well and it was fun to hang out with some friends.

Back at home, what did Santa leave for you?

Marnie – He left a HHHHHUGE doll house. I used a ton of H's because it was so huge. It wasn't even under the tree because was too big. It was in the corner of my room.

Jeff – More Lego Indiana Jones, including the video game and two Lego sets. The whole family got two Disney panorama puzzles that are cool.

Chad – I got an iPod dock and a sweet Dwight Schrute t-shirt. I also received *The Nightmare Before Christmas Collector's Edition*, an AFI CD, +44 CD and Cheezwiz!

MEDIA ROUNDUP

AT THE MOVIES...

Bedtime Stories

Adam Sandler stars as a lovable loser (what else?) whose niece and nephews' stories dictate what happens to him.

Ken ★★★½

Angie **

Chad **

Jeff ***

Marnie **** "I liked that he didn't actually get incinerated by a ball of fire. He just got fired from his job."

Eagle Eye

Shia LeBeouf stars as a troubled slacker (what else?) whose life is being manipulated by unseen forces. Think *War Games* meets *The Net*.

Ken ***

Angie ***

Chad ****

Jeff ****

Marnie ★★★½ (It seemed like she liked it at the time, but she's being disagreeable now).

Valkyrie

Tom Cruise stars as the hero of the story (what else?). To be fair, this might be a slightly different role for him, playing a Nazi determined to kill his Fuhrer.

Chad ****



...AND THE THEATRE

Les Miserables

The French Revolution, complete with squalor, robbery and prostitution, but with singing and dancing. More enjoyable if you don't sleep through it due to jet lag.

Ken ★★★½

Angie ★★★½

Wicked

The true story behind the Wizard of Oz. Glinda is not nearly so good nor Elphaba so bad as you might expect, and the Wizard is just a confused old man trying to preserve what is familiar to him, even if that means casualties and oppression of talking animals.

Ken ****

Angie ****

BOOKS

Diplomat's Wife by Pam Jenoff

This was a fun historical romance/thriller written by the wife of one of my best friends from high school. Angie ***

Mysteries of Godliness by David John Buerger

This was a very interesting history of Mormon temple ceremonies. A good read for Mormon Cliff Clavens. You'll be able to spout fun, useless facts for days. Angie ***

Human Croquet by Kate Atkinson

Purposely confusing narrative that is practically stream of conscience yet compels you to go forward. A great read.

Angie ****

Zero Game by Brad Meltzer

I read Meltzer's most recent books and liked them, but found this one more compelling than the others. It's a fast-moving mystery involving Washington insiders, but it all tied together better than the other books.

Ken ★★★½

MUSIC

Coldplay: Viva La Vida

Ken ****

I'm a big fan of Coldplay's first three albums, but this one surpasses them all. Buy the deluxe version with the *Prospekt's March* EP for \$2 more. I didn't, and ended up paying \$9 to buy it separately.



The London Eye at night

FROM ANGIE'S EASEL



Title: *Empty.*

This was great fun to paint and actually took quite a while due to all the details in the dilapidated old barn.

...AND KEYBOARD

- Virtual RS/PH #22: Gaining Knowledge of Eternal Truths
- The Unsung Hero of the Nativity
- Unity, Diversity and Conformity
- Who's Winning the War on Christmas? (this one got a shout out on Mormon Times)
- What is Good Church Leadership?
- Does Religion Devalue Human Life?

...AND KITCHEN

TANDY CAKES

This is a Philadelphia snack that kids love: Mix 4 eggs, 2 c. sugar, 1 c. milk, 1 t. vanilla, 2 c. flour, 1 t. baking powder, 2 T. butter. Bake in greased, floured 9x13 pan at 350 degrees for 20-25 mins. Frost with 1 ½ c. peanut butter. Refrigerate. Spread melted chocolate (1 large Special Dark bar) over peanut butter and refrigerate.

POMEGRANATE GUACAMOLE

Mix 2-3 diced avocados, one small diced onion, ¼ c. chopped cilantro, 1 c. pomegranate seeds, and the juice from one lime. Serve with tortilla or multi-grain chips.

People love it or hate it. But they *should* all love it.

RANDOM NOTES

- After the Ward Christmas party we brought the Swaney/Harrigan kids home with us and introduced Patrick and Mary to the 80s classic *Better Off Dead* while they waited for their parents.
- Ken and Angie arrived back in Salt Lake late on the 23rd and had just one day to finish up a little Christmas shopping. It was a stark reminder of why Angie calls last-minute shopping "the shopping of the damned."
- The majority of the time in SLC was spent at Grandma & Grandpa's house, but the kids covered all the bases. Chad spent three nights with the Albáns and Damien, and one night with the Rhoades, while Jeff and Marnie spent those nights at the Perrys. All three spent the last night with the Albáns. Thanks to everyone for opening your homes to us.



Marnie and Kira in Salt Lake

- Our 37-month old laptop crashed in Salt Lake. It happened to be the morning after Ken had caught up recording transactions in Quicken but hadn't backed up his work. We were lucky to get back in one last time to recover everything.
- We attended Sacrament Meeting at our former (Mountainview) ward in Taylorsville.
- We also made our usual round of the "Utah restaurants," including Noodles & Company, Training Table, and Old Spaghetti Factory.
- As usual, we also met up with the Utah part of the Liscoms. We had dinner at Dave & Toni's house with their entire family, all of the Utah-based Turners, plus Aaron, Virginia and their two daughters.
- We spent the last hours of 2008 (and the first hour of 2009) with the Reinsteins, Kevin & Allison Ellsworth and family, and PJ and Amy Harrigan.