



Alaskan Adventure Times

Vol No. 2

Alaska, January 2020

Free

After More Than Five Years Together, Shelby and Justin are Still Not

ENGAGED



Last year, I set the bar pretty high with the Alaskan Adventure Times. This year, I had a hard time figuring out how to top a historic Earthquake headline, but this one seemed pretty eye-catching.

Hopefully you read the headline right: Justin and I are still not engaged, and we are okay with that. Many in our lives recently have taken the plunge into engagement; we just haven't joined the pool yet. When I showed Justin the layout for this page, he joked about how I was pressuring him to propose, but he knows I'm not. We are not engaged and we are not married by common law (Alaska doesn't even have common law). We are happy with no timelines. If/when we get engaged, I will do my best to make sure you find out before the annual newsletter.

The pictures that you see above are from a Christmas Party

where I was pretty uncooperative but it fit this headline perfectly. The rest of this newsletter will show you all the things that Justin and I have been up to this year, other than getting engaged.

We have been near and far, we have been home, and we have had others visit our home. We have had changes, new purchases, and many successes with a few failures--which we aren't afraid to share--but other things have stayed the same. We live in the same duplex with the same rabbit, but I'm not sure either Justin or the Rabbit are excited about her still being around.

Just as last year, the newsletter is a little wordy so feel free to read the headlines and determine which stories you're interested in reading. My hope is that this news is a little more exciting and light-hearted than what you see published in the

real newspapers.

I have done my best to include plenty of pictures so you have less to read, and I'm sorry if they're the same that you've seen on our social media. **Many of the photos you will see are courtesy of Zach Kenner, our good friend and outdoor photographer.**

Before I let you get on to read the newsletter, I have to say a huge thanks to everyone who has made our year worth writing about.

For our new friends and family here in Alaska, thank you for coming along and making our Alaskan time an adventure, letting us tag along on yours, and helping us document everything with photos and videos for our loved ones back home.

For our friends and family back home, thank you for encouraging us to live our best lives, for dealing with the time

changes, for setting the video chat up at the dinner table or in living room so we could still be there for all the special moments. We know and understand how hard it is to have loved ones so far away, but thank you for putting up with us and our shenanigans. We hope that the stories you are about to read will help you understand why we are here and that it's all worth it.

As always, we are willing and able to open our home to anyone who is ready and willing to make the trek North to Alaska. We have a guest room that I'd be happy to clean my clothes out for your visit. I'm a decent cook, and Justin is always ready with an embarrassing story and great joke.

Your Alaskan adventure awaits, but if it's too cold or too dark or too expensive, you can enjoy ours for now.

NEWS

Career Growth for Both Parties, But Justin's is More Impressive

At the very end of last year, Justin had been promoted to General Manager of Knight's Taxidermy and I had submitted my resignation to Opti Staffing Group.

Justin is still the General Manager of Knight's, and I now work as the Senior Training Officer for a local credit union's collection department.

My job is significantly less exciting and photogenic, so I'll just leave you with: please remember to pay your bills on time and check your credit score regularly.

Justin spends a lot of time at the shop because he loves what he does (most of the time).

Nearly every time someone calls me on the weekends, they ask what Justin is up to, and if we aren't hunting, fishing or trying to hunt and fish, he is at the shop. He loves what he does and loves to share it with others.

If you don't have Knight's on social media, then you probably haven't seen the large



number of pieces that Justin has put out. Justin is one of the only taxidermists to do life size mounts and has completed an astounding 22, amongst other projects, in the year 2019.

His favorite, and least favorite, are the life size bear mounts. It seems that no bear fits the mannequins he buys. Alaskan

bears are some of the largest on the planet and no two are the same. Once he gets them fitted, he finishes the mounting process and completes the habitat, full service His taxidermy skills have grown to include custom poses, extravagant habitats and pedestals. He has become incredibly well known, and I can't even wear a Knight's

sweatshirt without people recognizing it and figuring out that "my boyfriend who works there" is Justin. He goes out of his way to make the customers happy, and they don't forget it. Justin has many repeat customers and a great reputation for his work. Maybe someday he will be as well-known as his boss.

Justin Back in the Ram Fam

This story and photo may look similar to one you saw last year, but if you look closely, the truck in the picture below is different. Justin is on his sixth or seventh truck since we moved to Alaska, and I continue to be grateful he trades in his vehicle and not his girlfriend.

After owning a Ford, he has come back to the Ram family with the most recent purchase of a 2018 Ram 3500 Mega Cab. We drove 3 hours to

Soldotna, AK to purchase this truck.

It seems like it was all worth it because Justin swears this is the truck of his dreams. It has a back-up camera, heated steering wheel and seats, Bluetooth capabilities, grey color, and a cab large enough for us to camp in.

Unfortunately, it was backed into while parked outside a café in Homer, AK...while I was driving it. I will never live this down.



Shelby Freezes for a Reason



On December 21, 2019, Anchorage, Alaska registered 7 degrees at 11 o'clock in the morning when I plunged into Goose Lake in support of the Special Olympics.

This is not the first time that I have participated in the Polar Plunge, but it was definitely the coldest time. In Iowa, the lake I jumped into barely had ice over the surface. Goose Lake's ice was nearly a foot thick with a hole cut in it for plungers.

Unlike many, I went completely under the water and the local paper was kind enough to capture the painful moment I broke the surface for an icy cold breath. Huge thanks to them for that.

Another huge thanks to all those who helped me raise \$575 for the Special Olympics Alaska. This is the most I've ever raised and have many of you to thank for that. Here is to next year's plunge!

Family Visits for Alaskan Adventure

Cronk Parents Visit Anchorage to See the “Sites” Over Summer



In August, Dad and Liz came to Alaska for an Alaskan Cruise and to visit and see the sites of Anchorage. Unfortunately for them, many of the sites were obscured by the smoke of more than 600 wildfires that ravaged over 2.5 million acres of Alaskan wilderness.

They were able, however, to enjoy a quick hike up to Byron Glacier just south of Anchorage. I made sure to call the Portage Visitor’s Center to make sure that the mountains were visible before driving down. This was their first time seeing and experiencing a glacier.

After some very creative leaps and bounds across streams of glacial water, Dad and Liz were able to get up close and personal with the snow and ice caves.

Lucky for me, I was wearing rubber boots. Not so lucky for them, they were not and had to remove their shoes and socks to cross where no rock bridges were available.

After getting to see that, they both had a better idea of what we love about Alaska since Anchorage wasn’t behaving well and showing the sites we see every day.

We also made sure to get them some Alaskan breakfast and pizza. Dad tried an omelet with Alaskan seafood and both were introduced to reindeer sausage. Before they boarded their ship, we stuffed them full of Anchorage’s well-known Moose’s Tooth Pizza.

Looking forward to their next visit to the Arctic.

Houseal Family Comes Expecting Outhouses and Icicles

In June, Justin’s Dad, Dwight, and his girlfriend, Agnes AKA “Fence Post,” came to visit. Dwight has been here before, but Agnes was coming for the first time. So, in good fun, we were sure to prepare Agnes for the worst before she got here: dark days, no running water, freezing cold all the time, and stinky outhouses.

None of these things are out of ordinary for parts of Alaska, but they are not normal for Anchorage in the summer. Nor are the temperatures we experienced while they were here.

While Dwight and Agnes were in town, Anchorage had record highs with temperatures in the 80s. We struggled through a hot, but short, hike to Exit Glacier in Seward, AK so they could see a glacier. Then we made them trek up another mountain to see another glacier in Portage and wrapped up the excursions with a visit to the Scottish

Highland games. Dwight and Agnes went back to the air conditioned truck while Justin and I ran out of water watching people hammer throw weighted salmon.

I think we showed them a good time, but really they showed us a good time. Watching the two of them argue while trying to pose for photos on the side of the road and struggle over small boulders in the trail was quite entertaining for us.

One evening, we made the mistake of playing a competitive game of Sequence with the two of them while drinking Alaskan wine, a mistake I will be sure not to repeat. I would hate to be called a “little heifer” again by Agnes when I kick her butt.

It was all in good fun, and I’d be happy to provide her with Alaskan Bear Creek wine again. Hopefully Agnes was not disappointed to miss the experience of outhouses and icicles and enjoyed the heat and glaciers.



ADVENTURE

Justin Visits Home



Justin has been traveling home every year since we moved here to make sure he still gets in a good shed hunting season. Sadly, this year he was met with 8 inches of snow that had fallen the two days before he arrived. Instead of shed hunting the whole time, he was able to spend his time mounting Skyler's life size goat and then two caribou and a white tail with Ryan Beeson (the capes were lugged all the way back from Alaska).

He was also sure to spend a lot of time with family; he met Grandma and Grandpa Thompson for breakfast and that turned into lunch. He also saw his mom and dad and spent a lot of time with Kenzie. My mom also made a brief appearance and Kenzie and Justin were kind enough to meet her at a gas station for a quick hello as she passed through.

Kenzie turned 10 this year and it is now becoming a tradition that Justin is there for her birthday. They went ice skating with Kenzie's friends and my cousin Shelby and her kids, and then they had a "kick it" at Deb's house in Cedar Rapids.

Every time Justin goes back to Iowa, I'm nervous he isn't going to come back. I am always very grateful to have to go pick him up from the airport; I don't care what time it's at.

Shelby Travels to Omaha in October

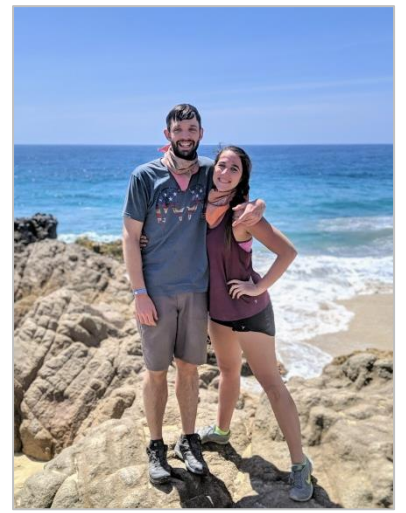
I traveled home for the first time in over a year to visit family and stand up at the wedding of a good friend. In only four days I managed to see my mom, dad, grandma and grandpa (times 2), aunt and uncle, all of my siblings, a few cousins, celebrate my niece and little brother's birthdays, attend two wedding ceremonies, take family photos, eat Cracker Barrel, and make it back on the plane home.

Whenever I travel, I always get questions about Alaska, so for the flights, I really did my best to try and blend in and avoid questions of Alaska. Unfortunately, my boots which so many complimented at home, are also known as Alaskan tennis shoes and gave me away on the ride home.

That was the only thing that went sideways; everything else went as good as it could go when you have a family of 1000 to see and only four days to do it. Apologies to all I didn't make it to visit.



Making Memories in Mexico with Family



For Christmas, my Mom and Eddie surprised us with a trip to Cabo San Lucas. Originally, we are pretty sure they surprised us with a cruise (Justin gets sea sick), but to this day we aren't sure if that's true or just payback for a once upon a time prank. Any way, we ended up spending time with the family on an all-inclusive resort in Mexico.

It's always great to be around the family and my brothers never disappoint with varied arguments

and stunts. We are such a show that we had two separate families stop by to tell us how fun we are; once at dinner and once by the pool. We really are something. There were 11 of us and the children were scaling the walls of the pool to get to the Jacuzzi and Eddie was asking Justin if he'd consider doing human taxidermy while we were at dinner.

This trip was by far one of the most amiable we have had, no

one got lost, no one threw up in the ocean, and there really was very little arguing.

We went out on an excursion and drove ATVs along the beach. Justin and I got trusted with James in our ATV while Andrew and Ryan got in trouble for speeding and going off the trail. On that trip, I yelled at Justin for "ruining all my nice photos." As you can see above, we got at least one decent one. Still glad it wasn't a cruise.

ADVENTURE

Hiking and Fishing in Summer's Record High Temperatures



Anchorage had record high temperatures this year with multiple days in the mid to high 80's.

While Dwight and Agnes were in town, we toured the Salmon Hatchery and learned the best time and place to catch Grayling, one of Justin's Alaskan goals. That time was July 4th and that place was Symphony Lake.

In 84 degree weather at 11 a.m., we took off on a 6 mile hike. The first 5 miles were hot and

kind of hard (because I'm a terrible hiker) but the last mile was the worst. It was across a boulder field. Even worse was that we only packed 64 ounces of water each and decided that the 6 miles needed hiked through the hottest part of the day. Also turns out it was a 6 mile hike one way, which meant we had to turn around and hike 6 miles out.

When we reached the lake, I put my feet in the water and Justin caught a few Grayling. I

managed to catch one too.

On the way back, I stopped for a dip in the creek (it was hot!)

Unfortunately, somewhere along the way, I also got eaten alive by bugs, we ran out of water, and we took shelter behind every boulder to savor the small amount of coolness we could find.

The way back was significantly faster than the way in and we both came out with a tan (and Justin gets to say that he caught a Grayling.)

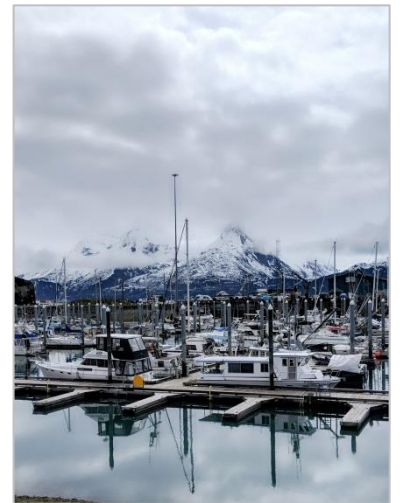
Iditarod Starts Twice for Shelby: Anchorage and Big Lake

The Iditarod starts twice, believe it or not. Once in Anchorage for the ceremonial start and once in Big Lake for the actual start. This year's race was 1049 miles and officially started on frozen Big Lake one and a half hours north of Anchorage in February.

While Justin was in Iowa, I made it a point to attend both starts and get pictures for Kenzie's class who was studying the Iditarod.



Valdez STOL Competition Starts with Bear Scouting



The "hunting" season started in April for us when we ventured to Valdez in an effort to try and hunt a black bear.

The drive to Valdez is one of my favorite drives because it is littered with beautiful waterfalls and history. Valdez is the northern most port that is ice free all year round. It has played a key role in the development of Alaska and is home to some tragic history as a result of the 1964 earthquake that wiped it off the map. The Valdez

oil spill put it back on the map. It's a beautiful and interesting place.

The last time we were there, we made the mistake of not taking the gun with us and saw one of the most beautiful black bears we have seen to this day. An added bonus was that the Short Take Off and Landing competition was taking place the same weekend that we went down this year.

We packed up the truck and grabbed our friend Zach Kenner and took off for a quick, 5 hour

drive to search for bears and watch the aviation show.

Right when we entered town, we saw a bear on the mountainside that Zach was sure was a "huge bear" but now that we have seen him spot more bears, he says that about all of them. Lucky for the bear, it was within city limits (we checked all the maps) and continued on to watch the short take-off and landing.

As I was elbowing my way to the front, Justin made sure to remind

me that if a propeller came off to duck and cover. There were a few times that I was sure I was going to need to. Lucky for both me and the pilots, it never came to that.

Before we left, I made sure to grab my Grandpa Cronk a STOL t-shirt as pay back for all of the t-shirts he has gotten for me from Oshkosh over the years. Justin and Zach ended up finding some friends and cinnamon rolls while I was gone.

We ended up turning around and driving home that same day.

OUTDOORS

Summer Fishing with Friends



In June, our close friend Tristan and his buddy Collin came to visit for an Alaskan summer. Unfortunately, they came at a time when we weren't sure where to find the fish.

We spent hours driving to and from Seward to snag silvers (not their kind of fishing), to Hope to try for Pinks (that weren't running), to Sheep Creek (to get skunked), to trout streams, and finally, the

Russian River.

Tristan and Colin were able to see a lot of Alaska and finally catch some fish to take home. They fished from morning to night for days to finally limit out on Red Salmon on the Russian.

We are so happy they were able to have a successful trip and go home fat and happy. Justin is becoming quite the fishing "guide" for anyone else looking to visit.

Skyler's Smokey Sheep Hunt

Skyler has had such a successful time in Alaska thus far that he thought he'd try for a sheep this year. He came up in early August to head out with Justin and Zach. Sadly, thousands of acres of Alaska were burning at the same time.

They spent a lot of days driving and scouting and hoping just to see the mountains, let alone a sheep. They ate like kings and hung out for 10 days.

They did make it out of the truck to

hike 46 miles, climb two mountains, cross two ice patches, take some beautiful pictures, and came close to taking a ram. They eventually decided it wasn't quite legal and hiked down without it. They only had about 3 clear days.

Justin says that smoked sheep is probably a lot better than a smokey sheep hunt.

Better luck next year, Cheetah!

If you see Justin, ask about the "wolverine attack."



Shelby Takes Caribou, Finds Shed, Packs Out



"Thousands of Caribou" is what we were told we would find off the Steese highway for a hunt that opens and closes within three days. "Easiest hunt you could ever do." Is another thing that we were told. Sounded like it would be right up my alley!

We met up with our friend Darren Toppin in Fairbanks, Alaska (a 6 hour drive north) and then drove another hour or two north to the Steese Highway for the Fortymile Caribou hunt.

Strictly speaking, it was a very posh hunt. We were armed with a

heated camper trailer, a side by side Canam, and a four wheeler. We drove up a day early to scout for caribou and found a few, but it was far from thousands. On the way back to camp, Darren pulled to a stop and pointed out a small bit of white in the field. I stole Justin's binoculars and deemed it a stick right as Justin took off running. I took off too. Turns out, not a stick after all. It was a caribou shed; unfortunately for me, Justin got there first. I walked around that field for an hour looking for more, both the boys found more. I found none.

The next day, we drove out to a hilltop where we had previously seen caribou hoping to get a second break. After a few hours and me falling asleep in the Canam passenger seat, I heard "we gotta go." And off we went after a "herd" of three bull caribou, all of whom were deemed "shooters" by Justin.

When we were finally across the valley from them, Justin ditched the four wheeler, joined us in the Canam and we got as close as we could. The boys set me up on the gun, pulled out their binos and told me "just above, hit, slightly below, slightly left" as I struggled to put the cross hairs back on my caribou after hitting him the first time. When we were sure he was down, Darren took his turn and took another beautiful bull. The third one was Justin's if he wanted it, and he didn't. For that we are thankful because packing out the two was plenty enough work. Justin's proudest moment is to tell everyone that I packed that caribou out myself. It took three trips up the mountain and a side trip to pick up my own caribou shed, but I did it. All. By. My.Self.

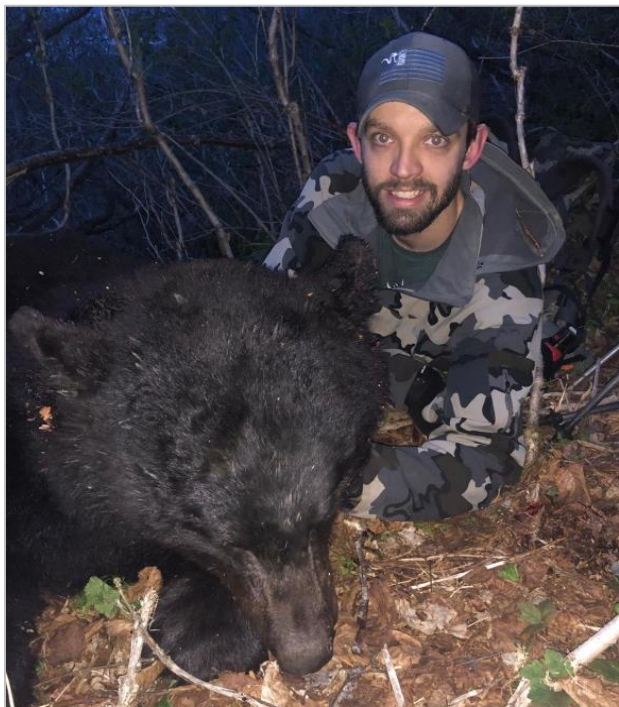
It got late enough that we ditched the four wheeler on the other side of the mountain. On the way out, we were sure we knew the way and had a camp of people tell us we were on the right trail and that it was "pretty prominent." As the sun started to set, the trail became far less prominent and we turned back after crashing through miles and miles of brush and running with a small herd of caribou. We were sure that we were spending the night on the mountain under my caribou hide.

Fortunately for us, we came across someone who pointed us in the right way to the "prominent" and muddy trail. The trail was so slick, we almost flipped the side by side. Almost 26 miles later, and me falling asleep between Darren and Justin sitting up, we made it back to the camper with two beautiful caribou and a few sheds.

Even though I have a beautiful caribou and a shed I found myself (which was part of the deal to get married) Justin still hasn't proposed (just in case you didn't read the front page story).

OUTDOORS

First Hunt of Season Takes Four Bears



I was supposed to write this story months ago, but I didn't. It was, and still is, difficult to write.

When we moved to Alaska, there was only one thing I wanted: to shoot a bear. In May of this year, I finally did. Many of you know that the person I am today is a far different person than I was 5 years ago. Finding and taking a bear would never have been on past Shelby's list of things to do. Current Shelby is here to tell you, it is one of the most remarkable, unforgettable, indescribable experiences you might ever have.

Until May, Justin and I could have counted the number of bears we'd seen on one hand. My optimism at finding and taking a bear was faltering and I wasn't sure it was ever going to happen. I pestered, begged, threatened to buy a guided hunt, and this year, a couple of our friends helped us make it happen.

This was my first hunt ever and it set a pretty high bar for future hunts to come.

We took off after work one Friday and made our way south to Prince William Sound. We made it there in record time, loaded the boat with packs, guns, and a little bit of food and took off with the boys in high spirits and me a little doubtful and nervous.

It wasn't even two hours later that the boys spotted a bear on the mountainside. We beached the boat and Zach, his camera, our friend and boat captain Darick, and I piled out of the boat leaving Justin to motor back out and man the boat.

We carefully made our way down the slick, rocky beach to a waterfall and began to climb. In case my sub-par gear was not a direct give away at how inexperienced I am, Zach and Darick had to hold my hand repeatedly to get me up the mountain and across the waterfall. Then they had to set the gun

up for me, calm me down, and guide me into taking my bear.

My first hunt ever was in Alaska, for a black bear, and it was successful. What makes this so difficult to write is I can't explain what it felt like in the moment, just that now I feel accomplished and proud.

The boys went on to shoot a bear each (all on the same mountain side) and beached the boat in the process. They were able to pack down two at one time while I cleaned a bucket of shrimp and got the boat unstuck. Justin and Zach went up a second time to retrieve Justin's bear, which was the largest of them all. It wasn't until nearly 4 in the morning after having the boat rammed with pieces of glacier, that we picked the two of them up on the shore.

We returned to port victorious with 4 bears, and I was able to make it to work on Monday.

DUCK!

Justin set out on another duck hunting adventure with our friends Jake and Zach. I am happy to leave them to this but even more happy to eat the duck hor d'oeuvres when they return.

On this particular trip, the three of them set out on an overcast day across the bay in Homer, set up in a cove and waited for the ducks to come to them. I went out on the boat with Big John to find some salmon.

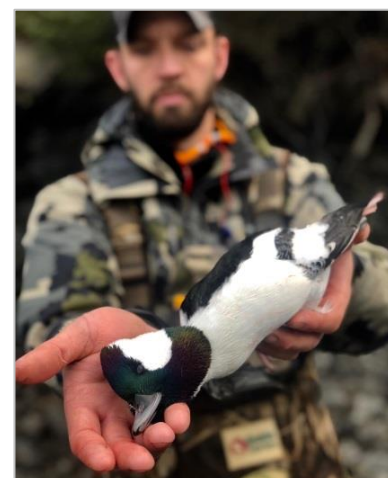
The boys were pass shooting and looking to hunt Bufflehead Ducks. They were successful in shooting a three-man limit. In between all of that, a loan drake Mallard came out of nowhere. Jake chuckled at it on the duck call, and it came to check out the decoys, even though they were sea ducks. He flew within range, somewhere between 50 and 60 yards up.

The boys were sitting in a big rock pile and Justin shot straight up. He missed him on the first shot, connected on the second and folded him up. The bird dropped. The Mallard folded in its wings and dropped hard...right onto Justin's head.

By the time they got back, they were all laughing so hard because Justin didn't even try and move out of the way, he just "ducked" and covered.

After trying and failing to figure out velocity, we just decided to say that bird hit Justin in the head at 28 miles an hour, and we are surprised he didn't get a concussion. He's convinced he did have one.

The bird pictured below is not, in fact the culprit. It is a beautiful Bufflehead Drake from that day.



LIFESTYLE

Shelby and Justin Kind of Try Yoga and Stuff



When the weather started to warm up in March, I decided that we needed to go for a hike (and maybe do a little geocaching). On the way back down, the sun was quickly setting and was too pretty to not take a picture. While I attempted to take a cliché sunset picture, Justin attempted to ruin it.

Next thing you know, he was proving just how little flexibility he has as he struck some seriously terrible yoga poses. I'm being very honest and objective when I say "terrible" and NO flexibility. He can't even raise his hands all the way above his head. I also have some really great pictures of him trying to be a bird and (I think) touch his toes?

Mostly it's just pictures of him bending over; I didn't think he would appreciate those being shared with you all.

But, I can't say my own attempts at the classic Instagram yoga picture were any better.

Unlike Justin though, I have since taken up yoga. In November, I signed up for a 30 day pass to a Yoga studio and went almost every day. I have signed up for a membership and force myself out of bed at 5 a.m. a few times a week to attend classes that make me sweat my butt off and hurt for days. Justin refuses to come with me.

The good news is that I think I might be getting better at it, but it still hurts.

Annual Reading Goal Increased and Met for 2019

The average American reads 12 books a year. This year, I set my reading goal at 40 books; not only did I meet it, I exceeded it. I read a total of 43 books plus 4 Harry Potter books (which I don't count because I've read them before).

For some, this is a lot of books, for

others, the expectation is that it would be a higher number. I would like it known that all of these books were read, they were not audio books, and many came from the library.

Justin is not a fan of me buying and owning more books as our

bookshelf, guest room dresser, hearth, and bedside table are already consumed by them. I'm not a huge fan of spending the money to acquire them anyway and saved nearly \$300 by using the library's services.

I am now the member of TWO different book clubs which has helped

me read a variety of books and make new friends.

I have many recommendations but my most recommended this year is the Discovery of Witches Trilogy by Deborah Harkness. Fantasy isn't my favorite genre, which says a lot about this series.

Cronk-Houseal Family Fully Embraces Alaskan Footwear

A Fashion Column?! I'm sure you did NOT see this coming.

This year, we have really become assimilated in the Alaskan culture in the way we dress. This is a slightly frightening thought for anyone who has visited here. Alaska takes "casual" to a whole new level. Thankfully, we have been able to maintain our ability to look nice when we need to, but we have adapted in our footwear.

A major purchase of last fishing season was a pair of XtraTuf Salmon Sister boots for me. Many of you saw and complimented these hearty, rubber boots with the octopus design on the inside. These boots are also known as Alaskan Tennis Shoes and are worn for nearly all occasions. They have trekked across rivers and glacier streams, sludged through fish goo on the boat deck, hiked multiple mountains, travelled to the lower 48, and visited the workplace once or twice (purely to get in and out of the building of course.)

To end this year, I purchased a new pair of shorter "deck boots" from the XtraTuf brand. They are seafoam green to match my Yeti coffee cup. Justin joined the XtraTuf family with his pair of boring, generic, tall XtraTufs. (He likes to match me and doesn't want to admit it so focuses on their functionality and durability.) While

I was purchasing my new pair, I sat on the floor of Cabela's trying to decide between seafoam and salmon or just buying both. Lucky for me, Justin's mom, Deb, bought the salmon pair for Christmas and now I wear one of each color.

Early in the year, we both made important hat purchases to withstand the freezing temperatures. They look

both rugged and fashionable at the same time. They have definitely helped keep our ears warm and I can't help but giggle every time I put my trapper hat on.

Rabbit has also developed a wardrobe this year with costumes for Halloween and the winter seasons. She hates it, but I love them.



LIFESTYLE

Dieting, Working Out Result in Weight Loss for Shelby

Towards the end of 2018, I started to realize that my clothes weren't fitting right, I couldn't take a good photo, and I got out of breath going up the stairs. So, in 2019, I decided to start working out, eating right, and trying to lose some weight.

It sucked.

I ate a lot of chicken and ground turkey with vegetables while Justin got to have smothered pork chops

and stroganoff. We would go to pizza with friends and I would order a salad.

Every day after work, and sometimes on the weekends, I was at the gym for 1-2 hours. I climbed so many sets of stairs, did so many squats, and was sore (and a little smelly) all the time.

I lost 16lbs this last year.

At some point in this process,

Justin thought he wanted to get in "sheep shape" and came to my gym with me. I think that lasted less than a week. Working out isn't really his thing and watching me lift slightly heavier weights than him wasn't great for his self-esteem. We also learned that he can taste all protein powders, no matter how you try to hide them, unless they are birthday cake flavored.

What's interesting is that we went on a few hikes together and he still managed to kick my butt up and down the mountain (except for this one time when he decided to carry a 50lb pack and I had nothing. I won that time.)

That said, he is working very hard to give up his Rockstar and Popart habit and has almost completely kicked them both.

Patio Gardening Attempt Ends Fruitlessly (Literally)

With bell peppers costing \$1.67 a piece on a good day, I have been determined to have a garden and just FREAKING GROW THEM MYSELF. One of the perks of living in the duplex is that we would be able to have a garden of some kind. I had some seriously big plans for this garden. Justin and I spent a weird amount of time at the local greenhouse picking out plants and deciding what to plant.

The duplex came with a greenhouse, and I was so excited and so nervous about planting in it. There are details to planting in a greenhouse that I just could not grasp. They get too hot, then too cold, they don't pollinate and I was googling things like "how to attract bee's to greenhouse plants." I ended up doing a patio garden so our neighbor's dogs wouldn't dig up all of my (expensive) plants. I went all out: matching planters of all shapes and sizes, so many vegetables, and some flowers; I was ready for this to

be a major success.

Turns out, you should probably plant before June 1st and it doesn't matter that the websites say you "should" be okay, you will not be okay. Even with the 19 hours of sunlight, we only harvested one tiny cauliflower and I didn't even eat it. I'm not even sure why. Our plants were very big and very green, but not very fruitful. They are now very dead, very sad, and covered in snow because I never pulled them up and threw them away when the season ended.

I did have some beautiful flowers for a bit of time, but even those didn't take off much. I lugged in big bags of potting soil, hand tilled the front flower beds, planted flowers, watered them frequently and all that happened is one of our beds turned into a litterbox for a local cat.

The beautiful flowers I did have were mostly hanging baskets that

cost me more than I would like to admit and eventually died due to an aphid infestation. I tried my best and bought all the right soaps and babied those plants so much. I'm wondering if maybe I'm just not cut out for this gardening thing.

While Dwight and Agnes were visiting, Justin and I could not agree on whether my plants were too dry, too wet, or just

right. Dwight was kind enough to send me a moisture meter so that I can try again this year. Hopefully I'll have a little bit more to show for my efforts.

I'm thinking about trying to start my plants from seed this year so that I can get them in the ground faster and maybe at a lower cost.

Wish me luck!



First Ever Salmonfest Attendance, New Friends Made



In the very same month that I was on the mountainside taking my caribou, I was on the fair grounds of Ninilchik, Alaska attending Salmonfest with my friend Candace and a few of her friends. I think I can call them all my friends now too, and I can't wait for a repeat performance again this year.

Candace has been after me for years to celebrate her birthday with this "Alaskan Woodstock", and I've never been able to make it. This year, I promised I would, and for a moment, I thought it was going to overlap with my caribou hunt, but thank goodness it didn't.

We heard so many amazing musicians,

ate so much good food, and enjoyed some absolutely fantastic company. I made it a point to glitter my face and drink and eat to my heart's content. I'm sure Justin was tired of my food pictures by the end of the weekend.

On Saturday night, we listened to Jason Mraz and then took it easy on Sunday morning with some spinach bread and limeades to prepare for the 4 hour drive home.

This year was one of the sunniest in the history of the festival and I came home with some dirty feet, nicely tanned skin and glorious tan lines, something I haven't really had since we moved here.

LIFESTYLE

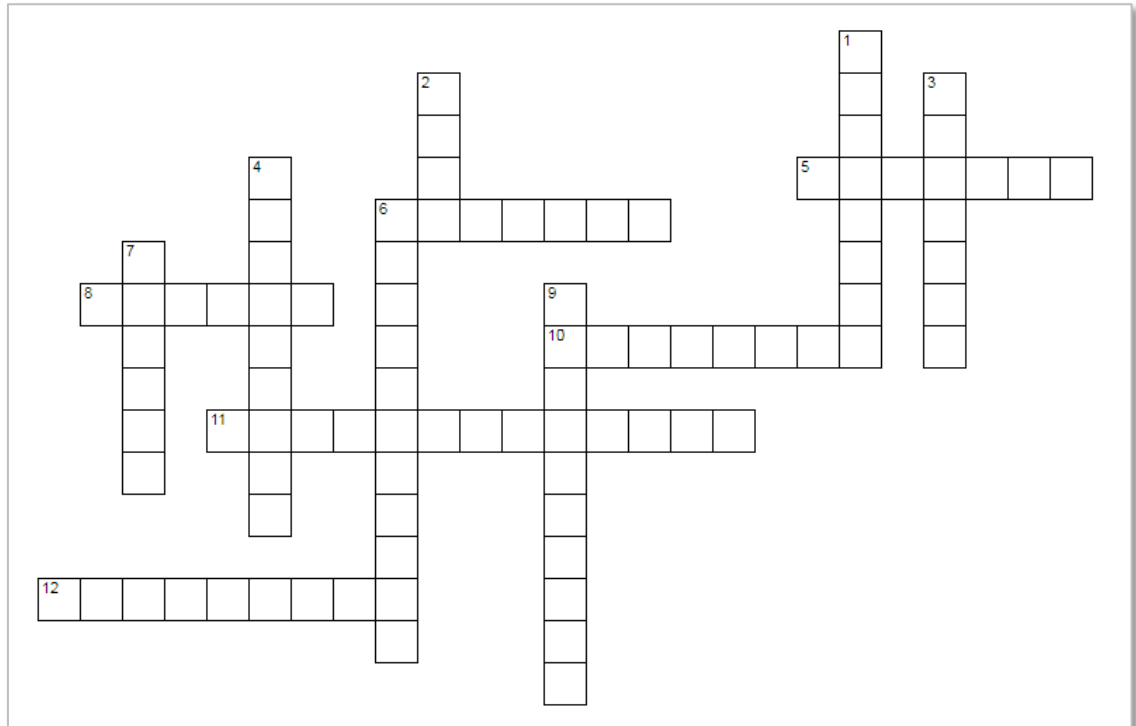
Recipe of the Year: Halibut Chowder

1 Tbsp Butter
 1 Onion Diced
 2-3 Large Potatoes Peeled and Cubed
 2 Cloves of Garlic (or more)
 6 Cups Chicken Stock
 8 oz Can of Stewed Tomatoes, diced
 2 Large Carrots, shredded
 1 ½ Cups Milk
 ½ Cup Heavy Cream
 Salt and Pepper to Taste
 2lbs Halibut, cubed
 1 Cup Shredded Cheddar Cheese
 Red Pepper Flakes to Taste

Our friend Darrick gave us almost 100lbs of fresh caught Halibut (a very popular, white fish) and I used some of it to make a halibut chowder and clear out our freezer. The bad news is that it was frozen, so if you try to use non-frozen fish using this method, I can't promise it will turn out.

- Place the frozen halibut in hot water and begin making the soup.
- Melt the butter in a large soup pot; add the diced onion and cook until it is soft. Add the diced potatoes and garlic cloves until the potatoes have softened (about 10 minutes).
- Pour in the chicken stock, can of tomatoes, and shredded carrots. Bring the stock to a boil, reduce the heat and cover it; simmer it for about 10-15 minutes. Add the milk and cream and season to taste with salt and pepper.
- By this point, the halibut should be somewhat cooked by the hot water and slightly flaky when you put it into the soup. There should be little need for cubing the fish.
- Continue simmering the soup until the halibut has finished cooking and is white all the way through.
- Stir in the cheese and red pepper flakes until the cheese is melted. Serve hot.

Alaskan Crossword Puzzle



Across:

- Type of duck that hit Justin in the head
- Wild Reindeer
- Shelby's Rabbit's "name"
- Ruined Dad and Liz's Trip to Alaska
- Location of where we shot our bears and also a current English Royal Family member
- Shelby's Favorite Holiday

Down:

- Degrees in the winter
- Justin's majestic attempt at exercise
- Delicious white fish
- Justin's field of work
- Shelby's industry of work
- Snowiest place in United States
- Type of hot weather that makes you sweat your butt off you live in Alaska.

They're All Crazy, Just Pick One (By Justin)

