

Holiday Card History

Volume 2

*A collection of Christmas and New Years cards
2011-2023*

Thor Olson and Poldi Gerard

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Preface

I grew up watching my father, following *his* father's example, coming up each year with handmade Christmas cards that nearly always included a family photograph. They were both avid amateur photographers and would corral and cajole my siblings and me into a studio-like set in the living room with carefully positioned lights and a camera mounted on a tripod that would be aimed at a scene of dressed-up children surrounding their proud parents. This often occurred at our family Thanksgiving gathering, allowing just enough time for my mother to get prints made, mounted into cards (often with her hand-stenciled or stamped cover designs), personal greetings inscribed, and envelopes addressed and stamped, all before the week of Christmas.

I fell into the same fascination with photography and even assisted in the creation of some of the cards. My grandfather once asked for my help with one of his concepts: a shot of him with my grandmother peering out a window on a wintery day. But it was not as simple as that. He brought in a spare storm window, detailed it with Christmas decorations and flocked snow, mounted it on a sawhorse in the family room, put incandescent lights on one side and aimed the other at the outdoor daylight from the actual window. He then positioned his subjects (himself and Grandma) at just the right position to get that wonderful mix of outdoor blue-sky-on-snow light and indoor hearth-and-candlelight. My job was to run the camera. I was sixteen and this was my first exposure to such high artistic production values.

A few samples of those traditional greeting cards might explain the natural urge to continue the tradition. They are both corny and endearing, the perfect mix to express your affection to the ones you care about. You will probably find this combination present in the cards in this volume, highlighting a wonderful chapter in our lives.



My grandparents' Christmas card, circa 1950



Our family Christmas photo for 1964, taken with a Polaroid camera, then reproduced and inserted into cards.

Introduction to Holiday Card History, Volume 2

I grew up with a tradition of exchanging Christmas Cards. Interestingly, although the volume of holiday cards has dropped by half in the two decades since entering the new millennium, it is Millennials who are now buying and sending the most cards!

Perhaps because of the ubiquity and ease of email and social media interactions, a physical card with a written sentiment, sent through the US Postal Service to someone's home, is seen as a unique way to acknowledge and emphasize a valued relationship. Certainly, it helps promote the feelings of good cheer and human connection at the end of the year.

Volume 1 of this collection captured the cards that my first wife Vicki and I sent during our 34 year marriage. They depicted the rich and eventful life we shared as we started our careers and raised a family. Sadly, the marriage ended, and the last entry in the anniversary cards described our last adventure to see Monarch butterflies hibernating in the Mexican mountains.

We separated soon after that excursion. This volume picks up from that difficult year and presents the cards that were created in the years since.

At first, they were terse representations of my experience of transitioning to something different-- I didn't know what. But as I found the way into my next life chapter, the missives regained a more personal narrative.

And as will be seen in those subsequent cards, I have found a partner to share my life travels with. One with whom I am deeply in love and ultimately asked to become my legally wedded wife.

These cards depict a continuing rich history as Poldi and I have traveled to places I never expected to see, shared novel experiences, and witnessed other life transitions: marriages, the births of grandchildren, and the passing of our elders. These life transitions included our own marriage!

She describes our time together now as "la terza eta," the third age, as we enjoy the returns of our life lived to this point. We are indeed lucky to be here, and I hope this set of annual holiday card updates will convey a little of our story to subsequent generations.

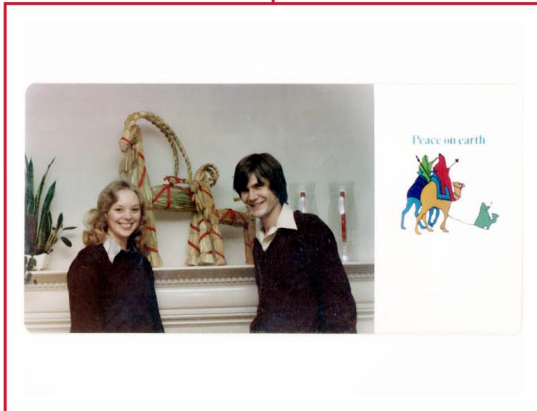
Thor Olson
November 2024



STS 134, ENDEAVOR'S LAST MISSION, MAY 16, 2011

1977

VICKI AND I HAVE BEEN SENDING HOLIDAY PHOTOS EVERY YEAR SINCE WE MARRIED AS A WAY TO GENTLY KEEP IN TOUCH WITH FAMILY, FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES. IT HAS OFFERED A CREATIVE OUTLET TO SHARE OUR ADVENTURES AND LIFE EVENTS.



February 2011

THIS YEAR MARKS THE DIVERGENCE OF OUR LIFE PATHS. A DIFFICULT EVENT, YES, BUT A STEP TOWARD A HAPPIER ENDING. ON OUR LAST ADVENTURE TOGETHER WE LOCATED THE SITE IN THE MEXICAN MOUNTAINS WHERE MONARCH BUTTERFLIES MIGRATE TO HIBERNATE THE WINTER.

Summer 2011

TABLE MOUNTAIN STAR PARTY, REVISITING THE START OF MY "ASTROPHOTO ODYSSEY" TEN YEARS BACK. I REFLECT ON THE COMFORT, SUPPORT AND ADVICE OF FAMILY AND FRIENDS IN THIS TRANSITION AND APPRECIATE THE RICHES AND RETURNS OF THOSE RELATIONSHIPS.



2012

I AM NOW TRAVELING SOLO, BUT WILL CONTINUE SHARING WITH YOU MY EXPLORATION, DISCOVERIES, AND ENCOUNTERS OF LIFE IN THE YEARS TO COME. AND I'LL START BY WISHING EVERYONE A WONDERFUL HOLIDAY, AND A HEALTHY AND HAPPY 2012!

THOR OLSON

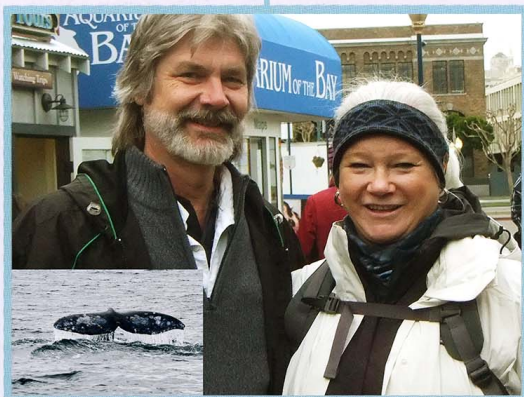


happy new year

Solar eclipse, May 20, 2012

Winter cancelled

I planned with my cousin Bonnie Norman to go skiing at Lake Tahoe, a sport I had not enjoyed for several years. I will have to wait some more after she reported that winter had been cancelled in California. We went whale watching instead, a terrific winter consolation.



Transit of Venus picnic

Venus passed in front of the Sun on June 6. I assembled telescopes and equipment, and my reacquainted friend Poldi Gerard (in red) hosted a picnic as we invited family and friends to view an event that won't happen again for another hundred years.

14850

I say goodbye to the dream house that Vicki and I designed and built. It was a life experience I never expected. I will miss the sunlit afternoons surrounded by trees and wildlife, hosting our friends and extended family in an elegant and spacious home (inset: New Years 2011), and the myriad little events that mark raising a child and providing the foundations of our family. I will forever cherish these years.



This Odd House

I have moved back to Minneapolis to renovate a hundred year old house. I am finding the project dauntingly bigger than expected, with many obstacles. But it is exciting, and with the advice of friends and the guidance of professionals, I am finding the restoration of an old house to also be a renewal for my soul.

I wish all of you a wonderful holiday and a prosperous and healthy new year.

Thor Olson



happy new year

The (happily ever) After Party • August 17, 2013

Sailing the Caribbean

Taking a break from house renovation and the winter cold, we embarked on a sailboat cruise visiting the Windward Islands. A dozen passengers and an accommodating crew provided a warm experience in a word dominated by the color blue.



Idaho in June

We visited the Olson western outpost in Idaho Falls. We were warmly welcomed and graciously hosted by my mom, brother Eric, and his wife Rhonda. Dad remained in Minneapolis to continue chemotherapy at Mayo.

This Odd House, in chocolate

We celebrated our commitment to our new life together, our sixtieth trip around the sun, and the renovation "After Party", all on Poldi's birthday. The cake was a delicious portrait of This Odd House.



No eclipse in Kenya

Although the total solar eclipse was eclipsed by a sandstorm, we had thrilling wildlife viewing in four national parks.

We wish you health and happiness in the coming year,
Thor Olson and Poldi Gerard

Happy New Year





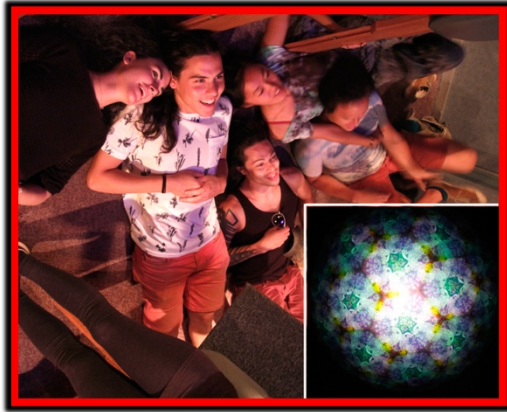
Elective Affinities

Derek Olson marries Amy Blitzer. An oom-pah brass band playing the Star Wars Processional, dinosaur ring-bearers, balloon artists, and a roomful of love made this a wonderful start for their new life together.

Tour d'Italia

Poldi arranged to visit her AFS host family and be a fluent guide for Thor's first exposure to Italy. Sadly, her "Papa" passed away as we arrived in Rome. She hurried to the funeral leaving Thor briefly, who promptly lost his passport to pickpockets. Here she is at Lago Maggiore with Mamma, Italian sister Rossella and brother-in-law Mario.





Garage Mahal

Renovation continues at This Odd House with replacement of the dilapidated garage with one that could shelter Thor's van. Fighting city zoning officials, he added space for a workshop, and converted salvaged skylights to clerestory windows.

Road Trip

We drove to upstate New York and spent Labor Day weekend with Poldi's three sons in Woodstock, where we met hippies who came to the 1969 music festival and never left. Here we are immersed inside the world's largest kaleidoscope.





1970



2014

Reconstruction of a famous photo with Rossella at the Duomo in Milan, Italy. Thor fills in.

We have been blessed with a year of love, travel, expanded family, and renewed friendships. We wish all of you a happy, healthy, and prosperous new year!

Thor Olson and Poldi Gerard



Happy New Year



Crossing the Dateline

Travelling from Hawaii and its volcanos to Malaysia on New Year's Eve, we completely missed the midnight ritual. By the time the stroke of 12 arrived, it was the next night. We were chaperoned by octagenarians Lyle and Dorothy, who showed us how to get preferred treatment en route, and friends Phuong and Siva extended their gracious Malaysian hospitality.

Crossing the Border

Poldi's Italian AFS group held a 45th year reunion in Rochester NY, visiting historic homes of Susan B Anthony and George Eastman, and commandeering a vintage carousel on the shores of Lake Ontario. After, we drove to Canada. Everyone should see Niagara Falls sometime in their life; if not on a honeymoon, then maybe for Independence Day!





Raising Monarchs

Our milkweed patch wasn't enough to attract them, so we ordered larvae and raised them until they metamorphosed to chrysalis. We then embarked on a road trip west, where they emerged as confused adults, born in PA, raised in MN, and released in MT. We visited Glacier Park and endured days of smoke from regional forest fires while scouting for observing sites for the 2017 total solar eclipse.

Remote Places

Poldi travelled from Italy to Hungary to catch up with her sister April, catching up with her son Nick in Budapest. They celebrated April's 60th birthday in an ancient wine cellar. Meanwhile, in a moment of photo envy, Thor signed up for a northern lights tour in Lapland, but overcast skies blocked the view until a 30-minute opening yielded some stunning shots.





Fun in Thor's photobooth at the wedding of Nick and Becca Ols?n

We have again been blessed with another year of love, travel, expanded family, and renewed friendships. We wish all of you a happy, healthy, and prosperous new year!

Thor Olson and Poldi Gerard





A New Beginning

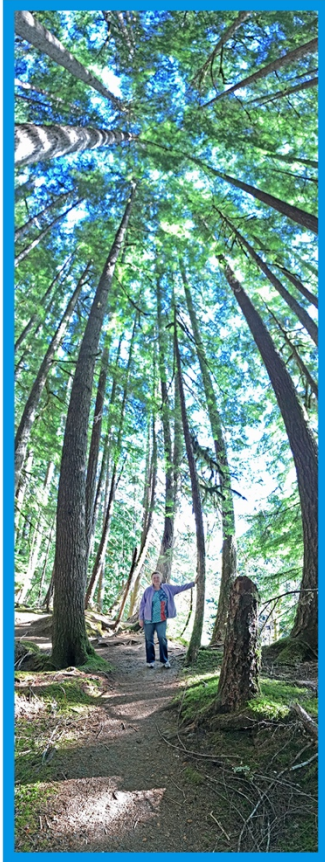
2016 began with a baby. Theodore Blitzer Olson, born on New Year's Day is shown here with two other Theodores and his Jedi father Derek. Teddy's parents survived his birth, and then went on with their lives as usual in the way all new parents do: teaching their son nocturnal sleeping skills, table manners, and diaper-filling. Light saber lessons will come later.

Urban Electrification

In May, the Garage-Mahal was equipped with solar panels. On sunny days, they generate far more than consumed, sending the surplus carbon-free electrons to the grid.

Eventually, the garage will house an electric car, but first we needed to find a worthy new caretaker of the beloved but clunky VW Eurovan. It went to a family that was excited to love it and take on its next 150,000 miles of adventure.





Ancient Forests

Poldi wrote a report in 6th grade about the Olympic Rain Forest and had always wanted to see it for herself. On the way she encountered a few other things accidentally left off her bucket list: collecting obsidian at Glass Butte, climbing through the volcanic "Crack in the Ground", and the magnificent views of Crater Lake.

Ancient Egypt

After seeing National Geographic photos of the rescue of Abu Simbel temple from the rising waters behind Aswan Dam in the 1960s, we each acquired a life-long curiosity about Egypt's art and remarkable engineering feats.

Our group of U of M alumni was enthusiastically welcomed as the first tourists to return after the Arab Spring, and rewarded with extensive access to the treasures and history of this ancient culture.





At the end of 2016 we said our last goodbyes to Thor's dad Tod, who among the many things he accomplished in life, instilled in his family a love of camping and hiking. Here is Tod with Thor and brothers Eric and John, in front of the (cloud-obscured) Grand Tetons in 1991.

The cycle of life continues, each year bringing changes-- some welcome and some not. We continue to appreciate the love of family and friends and wish all of you a safe, happy, and healthy new year!



Happy New Year 2018





A Year of Travel

2017 was unexpectedly a year of travel, starting with a trip to Cambodia to see Poldi's sons, two of whom live in Viet Nam. It was neutral territory we could all get to, and had the attractions of ancient temples and exotic culture. Attiss and Shal are shown in a canoe in a mangrove forest near Tonle Sap. Unfortunately, son Hoan encountered a visa catch-22: if he left Viet Nam to visit us in Cambodia, he would not be allowed back. Poldi was able to see him later in Thailand.

Resisting

It just didn't seem right, so as we did 40+ years ago, we registered our disagreement, Poldi attending the Women's March in Washington DC, Thor in St. Paul. The protests of science- and fact-denial extended through Earth Day and beyond. We are distressed at the deconstruction of our great institutions but will continue to support the restoration of "truth, justice, and the American Way".





Summer Weddings

We had the pleasure and honor of celebrating the young love and newly joined lives of Thor's niece Krista to Anthony, and of our friends Hannah and Krysta. Magnificent flowers dominated the Calhoun Beach Club; the wedding on Chesapeake Bay was simply beautiful. On both occasions Poldi got Thor to spin her around the dance floor!

Norway-Iceland

Thor's research paper was accepted by an international conference, a wonderful excuse to visit and discover the award-winning fjords of Norway. We took the long way home via Iceland where Poldi was able to spend an afternoon riding one of the famous sturdy Icelandic horses.





Our year of travel took us to far-away places, from Cambodia to Italy, Idaho, Iceland and more. Here we are at Mauna Kea, enjoying the sunset at the high altitude of the world's premier telescopes, symbols of our human spirit and curiosity.

We have had the great good fortune this year of experiencing a broad range of our planet's treasures. We have also treasured the love of family and friends, and wish all of you a safe, happy, and healthy new year!



Happy New Year 2019

Darwin Lake, Isabella Island, Galapagos, Ecuador



Tribeca Tribute

Poldi's son Shal's short film "The Last Fisherman" was selected by the Tribeca Film Festival. We took the opportunity to attend the screening and experience firsthand a little of the glamour and excitement of Shal's chosen field. The event punctuated other cultural experiences we enjoyed: visits to the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Guggenheim museum and to the Superhero store in Brooklyn.

Grandchild #2

On the Ides of March, Arthur Blitzer Olson arrived in the world to the welcoming arms of mom Amy, dad Derek, and brother Teddy. He is thriving and growing almost too fast for the "football hold" portrait with Grandpa.





Italy!

Poldi once again took Thor to her adopted home. This time we visited the Cinque Terre, tasted lard at a larderia under the white marble mountains of Carrara, ate bologna in Bologna, and pizza in Pisa. Here are Poldi and her Italian sister Rossella trying to balance the leaning tower.

The Equator

We each have long been intrigued by the Galapagos and its unique environment and life forms. We joined a small REI travel group of 20 people and explored it firsthand for a week. Each island has its own unique species of tortoise; here is one cruising the highlands of Santa Cruz Island leaving Thor behind.





Poldi's love of travel came directly from her father Lyle Gerard, who died this last year on his 94th birthday. Here they are at Kilauea Volcano Hawaii, on their way to Malaysia. Travel was only third of his life's passions, behind his dedication to exercise, and his love of reading, which in turn was exceeded only by his passion to share that love for books with his students and young readers everywhere.

Once again, we've had the fortune to visit many intriguing and beautiful places. As always, we treasure the love of family and friends, and wish you a safe, happy, and healthy new year!



Happy New Year 2020

Winter Solstice at the Arctic Circle, Sweden



The years keep advancing

Grandchildren age rapidly, and these guys keep adding to their birthday count. On his third birthday Teddy shows Thor how to place stickers, but that was a year back-- he is now four! Arthur, at age one, is like the rest of us: he finds his dad Derek quite amusing.



Poldi joins her sons in Vietnam

Two of them live there (Attiss, Hoan, center and right), and the third travels there for film projects (Shal, left). As 2020 began, after nearly a decade, Poldi returned to Vietnam, enjoyed the combined company of her sons, and showed Thor how “life spills out onto the streets” of Saigon. It is likely that we will be returning.



Movie Shoot

Poldi's son Shal converted our home into a film studio for a documentary for the genetics and ancestry company **23 and Me**. Here he and his on-location crew review Poldi's image on the camera monitor as they set the scene and lighting for her interview.

You can see her in the final release of the 7-minute film at www.shalngo.com/hapa



Lake Superior Circle Tour

Thor had enjoyed his touring motorcycle for over a decade but had never been on a tour with it! Poldi was eager and willing to ride pillion, so we decided to circumnavigate Lake Superior while still supple enough to tolerate the physical demands. We are no iron-butt contestants; instead we savored a few hundred miles each day of the sun and wind in our faces as we crested the hills and leaned into the curves of north (and south) shore beauty.



Dino Shindig

After completing the coveted Montana Dinosaur Trail Passport by visiting all fourteen of the remote and limited-schedule local museums, Poldi signed up for the "Dino-Shindig" in Ekalaka. We had the pleasure of attending lectures by famous paleontologists and then shared a beer with some of them! The street dance was rained out, but the skies cleared for a day of digging the famous Hell's Creek Formation, where Poldi unearthed amber, ancient fish scales and modern scorpions.



From left: Eric Persson, Thor, Rick Keeney, Jim Teter, Loren Schoenzeit, Phil Lodwick, Fred Nourbakhsh

Thor is Retired

Thor's company discovered that his R&D position was no longer needed. This seemed like an opportune time to cap off his career, so he marked it by hosting "Nerd Night", gathering his past colleagues to tell tall tales of their accomplishments. Here are a few that he had the honor and pleasure to have worked with, standing around artifacts of 20th-century technology.



Thor's mother Jackie, shown here with her mother and an earlier (1994) version of Thor, passed away this last year after a long decline. Her intelligence, vitality and talents with which she raised five distinctly active children will be missed by her family and an accumulated lifetime of friends.

It has been an eventful year for us, with adventures and life changes. Jackie once comforted a neighbor child worried that a particular holiday wasn't the same, "Isn't it nice that every year is a little different?" Our card is late but we wish you a safe, happy and healthy remainder of the year, even if (or especially if) it ends up a little different than the last!



Happy New Year

Thanksgiving at Home, 2020



Travel is Suspended

We were in Vietnam on New Year's Day, hearing occasional reports of a contagion in next-door China. We enjoyed the energy and remarkable landscapes of Vietnam including Ha Long Bay (above) and came home to plan our next trips. As the epidemic became pandemic, our plans to see Pompeii and to witness a total solar eclipse in Chile were cancelled.



Life in the Times of Covid

We still owe our grandson Arthur his 2-year birthday party. He won't remember what he missed, but we will. Frustrated at the loss of facial expression when covered by masks, we set out to make some that helped convey our generally positive outlook and encouraging emotions. As retired people, we have it easy in these conditions but are concerned about the difficulties that active families and workers (essential or not) must navigate.

[Open for more...](#)





Electric Bikes

On a whim, we visited a local bike shop that specialized in electric-assist bicycles. Poldi was exhilarated by her test ride, and we signed up just before everyone else realized they needed one and they became backordered along with toilet paper and pasta. We've been cruising the city streets and taking them to explore Minnesota's bike trails ever since.



A Rooftop Observatory

The Nightscaper Conference--yes there is such a thing-- was cancelled. But celestial events proceed regardless of Earthly pandemics, so Thor set up his telescope on our flat roof. The year included a visit by the beautiful comet Neowise and the close approach of Mars. Look for the grand conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn on the days around December 21, the phenomenon believed to be the source of the Star of Bethlehem story.



A Night with the Sunflowers

We are not alone in feeling uplifted by the sight of sunflowers. Philanthropist farmers plant fields of them for just this purpose, and we visited some this fall. Thor was curious: if their heads tracked the sun during the day, what did they do at night? So he spent a night in a field of sunflowers, aiming cameras at them. It was a magical experience. Read more about it and see a timelapse: <https://thorolson.com/2020/09/07/a-night-with-the-sunflowers/>



Escaping Quarantine Doldrums

We took our bikes and pop-up tent trailer out midweeks to explore uncrowded state parks: Minneopa, Lake Shetek, Nerstrand Big Woods, Sakatah Lake and Split Rock Creek, as well as Pipestone National Monument (above) and Jeffers Petroglyphs. Aghast that Thor, a lifelong Minnesotan, had never been to the BWCA, Poldi and her sister April insisted on being guides for his first outing. The three-person canoe met the social distance rules and time in the remote setting was a salve for our souls.



Hygge

We learned this word as we explored Scandinavia last year and experienced the feelings of well-being and coziness induced by candles in house windows glowing into the long dark winter nights. To capture that feeling for our own home, Thor set about making wooden candelabras that he wired with LED candles. They have now been installed in many of our windows where we hope they communicate comfort and transmit optimism for the coming spring and better times.

Last year we made a wish for you to have a “safe, happy and healthy year, even if it ends up a little different than the last”. We had no idea how different this year would become, but our sentiment remains. Stay safe, be happy, remain healthy, and may 2021 be very different from its predecessor!

Happy New Year 2022



A Penrose Tile Floor

Our porch renovation required a new floor, which Thor considered a blank canvas on which to implement a mathematical design sometimes described as a quasi-crystal, a pattern that can tile an infinite plane without ever repeating.

Poldi is shown here, exhausted after grouting the seemingly countless gaps between the tiles. The result was nice enough that we spent most of the summer in this room.

You can see a timelapse of this project at <https://vimeo.com/56305559>





St Croix Crossing

We continued to explore the region's bike trails, around our home and in more distant parts of the state from Coon Rapids Dam, Moose Lake, and the trail along the North Shore from Split Rock Lighthouse to Grand Marais. This is the newly opened bridge across the St Croix River which makes for a wonderful loop trail from Stillwater into Wisconsin and back.

[Open for more...](#)





The Postponed Birthday Party

We owed Arthur a covid-cancelled birthday party, so this year we gathered at a local playground on a sunny Ides of March to mark his 3rd. Seizing the opportunity to read a book to both Teddy and Arthur, Thor was delighted at their eager inquisitiveness. Though our interactions are still limited, we look forward to more such sessions.



A New Family Member

Thor's son Derek presents *his* latest son, Walter Blitzer Olson. Wally is a covid-baby, born during the rising peak a year ago in December. It came as a surprise to some who hadn't seen Derek and Amy during the social blackout of the previous year to discover that they now had *three* children!

Road Trip!

Recently vaccinated, we went on a road trip that took us to California and back, stopping to visit friends and relatives along the way. Thor was able to attend the previously cancelled Nightscaper Conference in Utah. Here is Poldi exulting in the outdoors under the towering Sierra Nevada Mountains.

The national parks were full, but we discovered many off-the-beaten-path state parks and Forest Service campsites as we worked our way toward Los Angeles (to visit Poldi's son Shal), and returned on a route that took us through Idaho Falls, where the former home of Thor's parents was transferred to an enthusiastic young family who will become its next caretakers.





Visiting Venice (CA)

Poldi's film-maker son lives in Los Angeles with Sarah, a "digital nomad" building a company supporting that work and lifestyle. We went sight-seeing with them in Venice, California. Perhaps it inspired Shal to propose to her in Italy (she accepted). In other news, Poldi is eagerly awaiting a grandchild from her eldest son Attiss with his soon-to-be wife Cassy. They are making plans to return to the U.S. from Viet Nam, where youngest son Hoan also lives.



It has been another challenging year. Our lives are easy compared to those with active growing families and with job and career obligations to meet. We wish all of you the strength and persistence to continue making the best for your family and loved ones and hope this coming year will be easier for all.

Love, Thor and Poldi



Happy New Year 2023
Our ninth anniversary, August 17, 2022



A new year, a new baby

To Poldi's great and pleasant surprise, her eldest son Attiss with fiancée Cassy delivered her first grandchild, Violet Lux Ngo on January 28, 2022. Poldi traveled to Vietnam to provide baby help as soon as the covid travel restrictions were lifted. Violet is seen here, well nourished and appropriately spoiled, at the age of 6-months.



Springtime in Alaska

Neither of us had been there and so, while many Minnesotans go south for a break from winter, we headed north to experience the aurora, wildlife, and rugged landscapes of Alaska. Here we are with our eager sled dogs, including multiple Iditarod winner, Barley. Also eager, Poldi's sister April met us for some skiing and touring in this fascinating state.

[Open for more...](#)





Shal and Sarah get married in Norway

Poldi's middle son Shal also surprised us with a sudden wedding invitation! He was marrying Sarah, a Norwegian woman. In Norway! The wedding was at her centuries-old family home on a spectacular fjord off the southern Norwegian coast. Poldi's youngest son Hoan, provided yet one more surprise, converting his girlfriend Grace to fiancée! They trekked from Vietnam to attend the wedding with us.



Summer with Attiss, Cassy and Violet

We had the pleasure of hosting them over the summer as part of their international couch surfing while they wait for a US fiancée visa for Cassy (a UK citizen). The family's mixed citizenships mean they can only stay three months in any one country and so after marking the end of summer at our local Italian Eatery, they headed to... Italy, for the next 3-month wait.



Poldi catches a fish!

We were invited by our friends Eric and Tina to a remote lodge in northern Manitoba, hundreds of miles from the nearest road. The northern lights and migrating caribou didn't show, but Poldi, on the first cast of a lure in her life, caught a Northern Pike. On her second cast, she caught an even larger one!



Kids carving pumpkins

Our grandchildren showed up to carve pumpkins, and with their enthusiasm a half-dozen jack-o-lanterns were created. Teddy (age 6) identifies the two he made. Arthur (4) is the creator of the shark-o-lantern. Wally (almost 2) is taking notes. Derek and Amy anticipate active Halloweens for many years to come.



This year marked the passing of my uncle Bob, a prominent physician and a role model during my impressionable years. Here is a picture of the “Divide By Four” hike through Glacier Park in 1987, the moniker denoting four of us crossing the continental divide. I’m on the left with my younger brother Eric; my dad Tod is on the right next to his younger brother, my uncle Bob.

We are saddened when our parents and mentors, and especially our peers are gone, but we can propagate their love and friendship. We wish all of you the best for the new year and encourage you to pass the love on to your family and friends.



Happy New Year 2024

Our wedding day, August 2, 2023



A 3D Proposal

Ten years earlier, Poldi had been interested; Thor was unsure. But now, “not wanting to die *not* married to this wonderful woman”, Thor found Poldi to be the reluctant one. Deploying his obsolete film skills, he crafted a ViewMaster reel to make his case at a popular restaurant. Momentarily weakened by the gesture, she accepted! We then had to explain to the curious but young servers how to operate a ViewMaster!



Death Valley Days and Nights

Returning to one of our favorite destinations, we explored the fascinating deserts, sand dunes, mountains, and hot springs in and around Death Valley, enjoying spectacular dark skies at night. This is “Dante’s View” overlooking the below-sea-level valley. Extreme weather had damaged the back roads, limiting our access, and it continues to challenge the park’s maintenance resources.

[Open for more...](#)





A Year of Weddings

In January it was Poldi's son Hoan and bride Grace, who traveled from Vietnam to be with family, celebrate Lunar New Year, and marry. Here they are showing off their wedding Ring Pops. In June, it was Attiss and Cassy in a ceremony managed by daughter Violet, shown here checking for proper shoelace knots. Our own wedding occurred in early August, on Thor's 70th birthday.



More Babies

Shal and Sarah, who initiated the year of weddings in 2022 with a ceremony in Norway, welcomed baby Magnus Sandnes Ngo on July 17, a second grandchild for Poldi. Faced with his narrowing lead, Thor decided to add another to his collection of grandsons: Lawrence Blitzer Olson arrived September 16 as the fourth boy in the Blitzer Olson family.



Rockin' in Morocco

We share a curiosity over rocks and fossils, but Poldi's compels her to look for them at any roadcut or shoreline. She was thrilled to join a group of serious rockhounds to travel the backroads and eroded lands of Morocco to find spectacular agates, crystals and fossils, many simply lying on the ground. We are not quite sure what to do with the hundred pounds of cool rocks and leaverite that we couldn't leave behind and decided to ship home.



A Picnic at the Pavilion

It was ten years since our commitment ceremony, and we wanted to share the anniversary with our friends and family. So we planned a gathering at one of the beautiful venues in our city—the Wirth Picnic Pavilion. Here we are with our original officiant and selfie master Max Allers, and the Master of Ceremonies at this event, Attiss. We had a wonderful time with everyone, making it another of our life highlights.



It was a year of weddings, babies, and adventures. We are now considered the “elders” in our families, causing us to wonder how we got here. But we also are appreciative of the great good luck that brought us to this point. We hope for more good years together, and wish the best for you and your loved ones in the year ahead.

Epilogue

Holiday Card History Volume 2

As I gathered the materials for this book, I have been reminded of the transitions in my life, the major one, of course, being the break in 2011 from my marriage of 34 years. It was an uncertain time, and perhaps to bring a feeling of stability back to my life, I continued the annual project of making a holiday card and sending it to friends and relatives. I could not match the ambition and scale of previous such projects, but I *could* convey a personal update and express my best wishes to everyone, despite the broken relationship that I now represented in their social circles.

As that break gradually receded, I encountered someone who seemed to resonate with my sometimes unconventional outlook and who was intrigued by the odd projects I took on. Poldi joined me in the quixotic effort to remodel an odd house, and we fell in love, portrayed by hints captured in the hastily composed holiday cards during those early years.

By the time we made our public commitment to each other in 2013, the holiday card tradition had survived the transition, and we used it to share our yearly adventures, along with personal and family events.

They were very full years—the card could only convey the highlights. Unlike many who express mild annoyance at receiving annual Christmas newsletters, I relish them all, well-written or not, because they are a channel of personal connection, a sharing of the things that mattered during the year when we may or may not have had an in-person interaction for such updates. And so I will continue to send cards each year, even to old friends I haven't seen in years. It gives me a sense of retaining an otherwise lost connection.

A decade after our commitment ceremony, it was clear that our late-life love was going to last. It pleased me to think that future genealogists could discover our close relationship... but only if the public record showed it. I nearly panicked when I learned that Poldi was no longer interested in getting married! And I am relieved that I could persuade her. The entries in our 2023 card, the final one in this book, show the results of my efforts—a proposal, a marriage, and an anniversary party, all of which made that year stand out as a life highlight for us.

We will continue to craft and send holiday cards to our friends and family. They provide that continued connection, however faint or strong, to people that matter to us. And they also provide a year-by-year snapshot of the lives we have lived, assembled here in this album for us to reminisce over, and for descendants to be curious about.

Thor Olson
November 2024

While preparing for the (nearly) Annual Olson Sausage Making, I encountered Thor's archive of notes and recipes dating back to the 1980's. He started attending these at his grandmother's house as a young adult, subsequently attending with his first wife and then with their son Derek. In the 1990's and 2000's, the extended family gathering moved from Grandma Olson's house to Thor's home. There was a hiatus as lives were reshuffled, and then in 2013, Thor and I started hosting sausage-making in "This Odd House", sometimes with as many as 20 people from Olson, Blitzer, Gerard and Ngo families. Now in 2024, Thor has cycled through the various life stages and he and I are the oldest individuals of each family's oldest generation. We have become elders.

When I reconnected with Thor, it had been decades since I'd sent holiday cards. I'm pleased that Thor's efforts creating these cards also help me stay in touch with friends. I also enjoy them as a record of the events and activities of each year.

After returning from three years living and working in Vietnam, my 32-year marriage ended and shortly thereafter—in a related development—I was pushed into early retirement. But then Thor and I hit it off after our second date (the first was in 1968) and I threw myself into helping with his house renovation project. "This Odd House" became *our* house and the base for gatherings of friends and family.

I couldn't have imagined the peace and happiness Thor and I have found in our late-life love affair. We wonder at it, appreciate it and bask in the warmth and joy we share. In 2013 we pledged to make the most of whatever time we would have together and this we have wholeheartedly done and continue to do. Reviewing the photographic record of our trips and activities triggers many happy memories.

Our family circle has shrunk as we have lost our dear parents and friends and relatives. At the same time, it has grown as we have gained stepsons, daughters-in-law and grandchildren. Thor and I are frequently surprised at just how old we really are, and that life has somehow moved us into our current role of elders. We are even more frequently delighted by our expanding extended family and at watching our grandchildren grow and develop.

We hope that someday this book will give a glimpse of us and our lives to those grandchildren...and perhaps their future children, our great-grandchildren.

Poldi Gerard
December 2024