

## **2016 In The Rearview Mirror, The Good And The Bad**

### **2016. December 31. The last day of the year.**

I always find it mentally refreshing to reflect on the past. Thinking about things that made me smile and thinking about things that made me cry. Giving me a new or changed perspective. 2016 brought it all out. In fact, 2016 was a personal monumental year in many ways. This post, in a sense, is my "Christmas letter" that I never wrote.

### **Cancer and Death**

Well, we might as well start with the sad so I can end up on a happy ending. Death. Cancer. It all really sucks. My mom passed away on April 11, a Monday, in the afternoon. I will never forget this day. Ever. My mom had many health issues in her life. And she deserved none of it. Why? She amazed me for what she accomplished during her life. No, she didn't win awards or work at a prestigious job.

She raised our family.

A husband, four of us kids. Was she perfect? No. But she did accomplish some pretty astounding things. For example, she budgeted her money so we could all eat. And that was no easy task. Most people could not do today what she did for us. And she did it with no government assistance. No, we never went hungry but we had rations. Us kids knew never to ask for a second glass of milk at mealtime. Yes, we had Christmas presents under the tree but it was pretty minimal. There were no extras. We didn't have a car until I was in the 8th grade. And while some don't may not think that's a big deal let me just say, I knew other family like ours where their family did not have a car.

But my mom managed our family. And she did a damn good job considering what life had given her.

My mom had cancer and it ravaged her body. It took parts of her body away and disfigured others. She lived in pain. Her pain was always hard to see but near the end of her days, it was beyond what I could bear. I really have yet to deal with it all but it gives me comfort she is not in pain any more. But I often question myself whether we did enough for her.

I did write a post about "[Cancer Sucks.](#)" It's pretty raw as I wrote it a week after her death.

Now that I have wiped my tears away, let's talk about the rest of my year.

### **Amazing Experiences**

If you would have told me 5 years ago about some of my experiences in 2016, I would never have believed it. Going to Vietnam? Are you kidding? But I did and was an absolutely once in a lifetime trip. Of course, I had to write about that too, My trip to [Vietnam was truly amazing](#). I tried to write about and talk about it, but I truly felt like I failed. Words cannot do the trip justice. It was a life changing trip and am so appreciative to the [MARL](#) program for allowing me this opportunity.

## Agvocracy

Agvocracy has been one of my pet projects this past year. I am truly passionate about farming. Why? It scares me when I see all the untrue stories being told and spread about how our food is raised and grown. So even though it seems like a daunting task, I do my small part to help connect consumers with farmers. I am on the Minnesota Pork Board where we, as a board, decide how checkoff dollars are best spent. Checkoff dollars are money pig farmers contribute to. These dollars can only be used for promotion, research, and education. I am also involved in the CommonGround program. Again, we are funded by checkoff dollars from corn and soybean farmers. Both of these programs have allowed me to be involved in some very cool events.

Through CommonGround, our big event of the year was an event, "Field to Fork" where we invited people that have some connection to food, but not necessarily farmers. At the local level, we did a county version, entitled "From the Ground Up." Again, we invited local people that may not have a direct connection to agriculture. Both were deemed a huge success. And I am still smiling. Check out "[How Farmers Are Reconnecting with Consumers.](#)"

Through the Minnesota Pork Board and National Pork Board, I was involved in a food blogger tour that came to Minnesota. The food bloggers toured a hog farm, which for many was a first time experience. I talked with them about what they saw and helped them understand why we do what we do. Again, a great event.

In July, I ventured to Sacramento, California for the international Food Bloggers Conference. Again, I had the privilege of connecting with other food bloggers. It was interesting to learn their perspective of food and agriculture. Check out my blog, [What I Learned at the Farm-To-Fork Food Blogger Conference](#).

In March, I graduated from the MARL (Minnesota Ag Rural Leadership) program. The MARL program is an 18-month program where we are taught leadership skills along with learning about Minnesota's ag and rural issues. This was absolutely one of the best things I have been involved with in my life. Not only did I make new friends, but the knowledge and experiences were second to none. So how did it change me?

I am now more self confident. I am not as afraid to make mistakes or sit quietly in the corner.

## Minnesota Farm Living

A guide for navigating where your food comes from  
<http://www.mnfarmliving.com>

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Prior to MARL, I would have been the person who would say, "this needs to be done, or why hasn't that been done. . ." Now, I am taking more of an initiative on issues I feel need to be addressed. One thing I wanted to see were [Social Media Breakfasts](#). After working with the local Chamber of Commerce, they are now a reality.

2016 has taken me to a number of places. Vietnam, Sacramento ([Farm-to-Fork Bloggers Conference](#)), St. Louis, Kansas City. I have also done a few speaking engagements throughout the year. Again, I don't take my advocacy efforts seriously in the sense that I know it's a really big world out there and I am just doing my very small part to make that world better. And that's why I encourage all farmers to participate in whatever manner they can to help connect consumers/influencers to farmers. It makes a difference.

## Blogging/Social Media

My blog and online presence continues to grow. I have added a weekly newsletter I email to subscribers. I also completed another "[30 Days of MN Ag](#)" in November where I highlighted a Minnesota farmer during the month. I have learned, through these stories, that everyone has a story. And people love to read about other farmers--how we are similar and how we are not similar. It's a great series. My main social media presence is still blogging and Facebook. I do twitter, Instagram and Pinterest but have limited success on those platforms.

## Final reflection

As I think back on the year, I know that I am a different person today than I was on January 1, 2016. And hopefully different in a good way. I have met new people along the way. I look at the world in a different way. I have somewhat embraced the "no regrets" attitude. Our tomorrow is not guaranteed and I don't want to live with, "what if." My personal relationship with God is growing and I want that growth to continue. The election process was very hard on our country and still is. I don't want to be political in this post but it has affected many people. All I can say is I am praying for our country and our future.

## Future

I don't know what my 2017 will look like. I need to spend some time making goals including personal, family, blogging, etc. So even though I don't know my 2017 specific plans are, I do know that God will guide my path down that road of life.

I would love to hear some of your 2016 reflections and maybe some 2017 goals.