



After a three-year hiatus, the goat has decided to make a reappearance. For you non-goat initiates, here is the story of the goat: In Russia, the winter string of holidays concludes with the 'Old New Year' which is celebrated during the night between the thirteenth and fourteenth of January. This holiday is called Starry Noviy Goat. Starry means old, noviy new, and goat is an excellent English phoneticism of year. The Russian Orthodox Church didn't switch to the Gregorian calendar we use today until rather late in the game; instead they continued using the Julian calendar. Between the two calendars there is an offset of about thirteen days, hence January 14 becomes New Year's Day.

Now that we all know what Starry Noviy Goat means, why this letter? The holiday season is always a busy time, even for the most prepared of people. So, to make our lives easier, we have decided to send our Christmas letter to everybody in the middle of January. The only possible candidate for a holiday is, you guessed it, the goat holiday. Introductions aside, what have Anastasia, Troy, and Alexei been up to in 2008?

The firsts on the Alexei front are the most interesting, so we'll begin our tour there. He sampled his first real food in early spring and ever since has been a hearty eater. In the locomotion department, Alexei took a little longer than his mother wanted to get a move-on. Nevertheless, we witnessed his first rollover, first crawl, and first steps. His first trying tooth turned into sixteen pearly whites by yearend. Communication: Alexei learned to wave bye-bye; kiss on demand; say a few key words such as "Mama", "Papa", and "lampa"; sign the even more important "please", "thank you", and "all done"; and scream for everything else. Anastasia speaks solely Russian to Alexei at home while Troy does double duty (English and Russian). Hopefully, our little man will take the best of both his parents and be bilingual. Musically, Alexei shows keen talent for his small stature. He can bang a few notes on his toy drum, play up to one note at a time on his recorder, tickle the ivories, and wave his arms better than half the conductors out there to music he likes.

Anastasia has enjoyed numerous Circle times and other such kiddie activities at the local library with her son. In spite of all the fun that being a full-time Mommy entails, Anastasia is ready to re-enter the workforce. As such, she began her job-search this year and is hopeful of finding employment by the end of January. A several-year-old goal that Troy finally realized this year was revamping his website. While still a work in progress, <http://tselliott.name/> chronicles our family's adventures from three unique perspectives. If this yearly letter doesn't satiate your appetite for Elliott trivialities, feel free to pop in over at the site and keep dibs on us.

If there were such a thing as a scale of churchiness, we'd be pretty far on the churchy side. Alexei was dedicated on January 19, just after turning three months old. The support of all our family and friends was obvious from the large turnout. Although, due to an atypical lack of communication on our part, half the friends didn't know the correct time and wound up missing the dedication portion of the service. An especially special guest for this occasion was Anastasia's mother, Olga. She visited us from Russia for a month. Doting on the first grandchild (an American!) made her third stay in America all the more charming.

A rather nice coincidence is that both Troy's and Anastasia's mothers' birthdays fall right around the same time. Anastasia orchestrated everything to have a surprise birthday for both young ladies. The catch was Olga was the only one who didn't know about it. From walking into an empty room full of people until opening her present — a sweatshirt with a picture of Alexei and her, she was duly surprised. Troy's mom only found out it was a celebration of her great age (er, wisdom) when the cake was placed on the table bearing her name as well.

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elliott annual review

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2009 edition



S. N. Goat, Jr.

This year's goat is made possible courtesy of outstanding Russian craftsmanship. While visiting the motherland, Anastasia chose a few whistles to bring home as presents for some of Alexei's friends. Being the excellent quality control Mommy that she is, Anastasia tested each whistle to make sure it worked. This particular one worked just fine not only as a whistle, but also as lipstick. After a note or two, the cheap white paint has a tendency to rub off on the whistler's whistle. Needless to say, this toy never found its way into a baby's hands. And so, without further ado, please welcome this lovely little tot-toy in the shape of a goat as the 2009 goat of yesteryear.

Every family tree needs a playboy — the rich uncle that always has everything even when he doesn't have anything. For Alexei, that would have to be Uncle Trevor, Troy's brother. Christmas 2007 found him bestowing a hefty gift certificate to Troy and Anastasia for the Chesapeake Beach Spa and Resort. After much deliberation, we decided that it would be fun to use for Anniversary #1. Being the young parents that we are, we couldn't bear the thought of being away from our bambino for a few days, and the decision was made to bring him with us on our romantic getaway. (Those of you with children are probably chuckling to yourself.) Little did we know that Alexei decided our one year anniversary was occasion enough to start cutting teeth. And after a few sleepless nights in a comfy hotel, he produced a lovely little tooth! Thank goodness for the masseuses in the spa.

Throughout 2008, Alexei was fortunate enough to have his own in-home monthly photo shoot. Shortly after being born, he charmed a photographer friend of ours. She insisted on having exclusive rights to the lad, and we, the parents, didn't object. As he grew and could do more, the photo shoots became more demanding on everyone involved. One memorable session ended abruptly after about 20 frames had been fired. Alexei enjoyed being photographed in his birthday suit so much, that he decided to water the couch on which he was being photographed!

The first trip to the beach as a family happened mid-June. We headed to Assateague Island for the day. Another couple with an infant a few months younger than Alexei joined us for part of the time, and we enjoyed some fun in the sun together. While the beach on Assateague is pristine, once the dunes are breached en route to the parking lot, mosquitoes the size of small birds begin their attack. Alexei's favorite part was undoubtedly being carried by his running mother back to the car. He thought it was all a game when in reality Anastasia was trying to keep herself in the food chain.

A few weeks later, the entire Elliott clan made their way to the Outer Banks of North Carolina. Everybody took turns playing with our little bruis-

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er; we believe in sharing and did our honest part to share him. It was nice to catch a few moments as husband and wife, sans papoose. At first, water didn't agree with Alexei much. But by the end of the week, he loved to go in the swimming pool and would sit with his feet in the ocean for a little bit. Alexei even got to enjoy fireworks on the beach for July 4th. He slept soundly for the first half of the display, but then awoke and pointed at the pretty 'lamps' in the sky.

To compensate for his position on the church scale, Troy headed to Sin City the first week of September. Between all of what Las Vegas is famous for, Troy found himself working harder than ever. The company where he works was a sponsor at a convention for software developers that design databases. As if that weren't enough, they provided additional training before and after the official conference. Networking, presenting, and learning completed, there was a little time left for fun. Watching the sun crest the mountains encircling Vegas is an emblazoned image on Troy's mental retina...especially after a long night on the town.

One brief week after visiting fabulous Vegas, the whole family took flight to Russia. Traveling with a small child can be anything but easy on the nerves. The ten-hour flight from Washington, DC to Moscow, Russia loomed ominously in the future as the day of departure approached. Then, when the time finally arrived, Alexei slept peacefully for nine of the ten hours. We even had to wake him up for the landing! Several friends helped shuffle us through Moscow directly after clearing customs and onto a train. A few hours later and Anastasia's grandmother laid eyes on her first great-grandchild. For a little over a week we lived in relative peace and harmony with great-grandma and aunt. Other than the occasional-every-five-minute screech that Alexei was too cold or getting stuck in some quicksand-like mud in the middle of a forest while gathering mushrooms, our stay in Murom was pleasantly uneventful.

In fact, this carefree existence nearly lasted a bit longer than we had planned on. It turns out there were no available seats on the train back to Moscow.

So, we did what any real Russian would do — we took the cheap, middle-of-the-night train with one big bed for the whole train-car to share. A bit past midnight, a train paused for two minutes, and we, along with scores of other people, hopped aboard and elbowed our way onto the communal mattress.

Catching this train did have several advantages. One of which was that we could spend a day in Moscow being tourists. Troy really wanted to do this so that we could take pictures of Alexei in all the famous places. Naturally, Alexei had other plans and slept through most everything. A highlight of our few days in Moscow would have to be visiting Anastasia's elementary classmate from Latvia. She had just given birth to a son ten days prior. Both women compared labor stories, talked about their lives, and in general caught up.

The Russian trip now about halfway over, the Elliott trio headed south to within a few hundred miles of Georgia. Following a pleasant three-hour plane ride and a car ride of the same length, Anastasia's sister, Sonya, and mother, Olga, began playing with Alexei. The stay in Stavropol was punctuated by Troy returning home too late from the city (he got lost), a trip to the grave of Anastasia's father, many sushki (hard circular bread the size of doughnut holes) for Alexei, Troy teaching a class to a bunch of seventh-grade students for Anastasia's former English teacher, lovely visits with Anastasia's classmates, Alexei's first birthday party (which Troy missed),....wait a minute. Why would a fazha miss his son's first birthday?

The answer starts somewhere back in July. In all the fun and excitement of buying plane tickets to go visit the Russian relatives, we overlooked the fact that Troy is only allowed to be in Russia for 30 days with a tourist visa. Despite all of our rushing around to try and arrange it so that we could be together for the entire five-week stay, Troy needed to leave a week earlier than Anastasia and Alexei. On

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Friday, October 9, Troy bid farewell to his wife and kid and began the long trip back to Maryland. Alexei's birthday celebration began a few hours after Troy's flight landed. There was so much excitement surrounding his big day that Alexei didn't even notice that Daddy was MIA.

The return for Anastasia and Alexei was quite symmetrical. Where the wee boy slept nine and played one of the ten-hour flight to Russia, the converse was true on the way home. Fortunately, the people on the plane were accommodating, so he had no problem walking throughout the aisles hour after hour. Less than twenty-four hours after landing, Alexei got to celebrate his second first birthday. For the US-contingent that had been missing him for over a month, Alexei's American birthday brunch was held at Troy's parent's place. Even in his jet-lagged condition, the birthday boy sampled some cake and ice cream with glee.

October rounded out quite nicely for our family with Halloween. The neighborhood where we live turned out to be a lot more kid-laden than either of us realized. Our little Pooh was the first trick-or-treater most people welcomed. Like most holidays, Halloween takes on a new specialness when a youngin' comes along. Not wanting to only enjoy his nephew

at holidays, though, Uncle Trevor has made a habit of finding time to do dinner with us every other week or so. Alexei has grown even more accustomed to seeing him; we all enjoy his impromptu pop-ins (and the food isn't that bad either).

Thanksgiving blipped by on the radar screen with the family all at the same table (or four tables, to be more accurate) at Troy's grandparents'. With Turkey Day over and the Christmas season officially upon us, our pace of life accelerated as the year came to a quick close. Anastasia was able to resume playing her cello this holiday season and kept quite busy in the month of December gigging about. Troy got permission to sneak off to New York City for a Wayne Shorter concert and enjoyed the trip with a high school bud. Finally, a few days before Christmas, we moseyed on over to a local lot selling trees and chose a misshapen beauty that fits our living room perfectly. Christmas and a few days on either side were spent with Troy's family, and the (New) New Year shared with friends. The young Mr. Elliott even witnessed the ball heralding in the new year for the first time in his life, followed immediately by bed.

From Assateague to Russia, bland porridge muck to real "big people" food, and a baby dedication to Vegas, 2008 has held a year's worth of memories. We cherish the ones that you shared with us and hope there will be many more to come. As we look forward to all that 2009 has to offer our budding family, we sincerely wish that your [old] new year is at least half as fun as ours will be.

the elliotts

anastasia • troy • alexei

The Extraordinary Alexei in 2008

March 27 th	Rollover without any help	mid-August	Crawl
April 10 th	The first tooth pokes out	August 31 st	My first step
April 12 th	Eat solid food	September 1 st	Ferris wheel ride
April 14 th	Bang on a drum	September 13 th	Flight on an airplane
May 8 th	First time on a boat	September 14 th	Train ride
June 2 nd	Wave bye-bye	September 28 th	Walk five steps
June 12 th	Go to the ocean	October 3 rd	First haircut
June 15 th	Visit the zoo	October 12 th	Hurray! ONE year old
June 17 th	Circle time at the library	November 2 nd	Pony ride
July 4 th	Learn to clap	mid-November	Sign please & thank you
August 17 th	Ride on a merry-go-round	December 27 th	Play a note on the recorder