



Holiday Hello

Russell, Heather, Dylan and Ben Thomas
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2014

This was a year of transformation for our family. Heather received news in early February that she needed surgery to reduce the size of her pituitary gland. She braved that procedure in September, and has been transforming herself to respond, adjust and embrace the changes her body continues to go through.

Dylan struggled greatly in his first year of high school, but found his stride as the year came to an end, then really flourished when he transferred to Westwood High School in the fall for grade 10. His performance in the recent production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was quite remarkable.

Ben is transforming from a little boy to a fine young man. He has taken his many talents and woven them into captivating short films, impressive drawings, and an unforgettable performance as the Ghost of Christmas Past in *A Christmas Carol*.

Russell faced the greatest period of professional uncertainty as his time with the Arts Council and Keyano College came to an end mid-year. The move to the United Way and the launching of Birdsong Connections combined to make the final 6 months of 2014 completely inspiring and perfectly delightful.

A lot has changed, but much has stayed the same. We remain close knit, committed to our community, and to each other. There have been tough times, tears of frustration and sadness, and periods of great tribulation. But has been an equal measure of unparalleled joy, unconditional love and support, and a sense of gratitude for all that we have in this life.

Our best to you and yours as you approach 2015 - may it be a wonderful year, abundant in goodness and love.



50th Anniversary

The far flung Thomases and assorted friends and relatives traveled from near and far and converged in Kamsack for the 50th wedding anniversary celebration for Charles and Loraine (Russell's parents) in November.

Apart from a captivating magic show (which has inspired Ben to learn several magic tricks), stories were shared and a great time was had by all.

It was so nice to see everyone, particularly all our nieces and nephews, who we don't get to see often enough. Mom and dad both looked and felt great, and enjoyed all the company.





This year was a pretty awesome year for me, but now that I come to think of it, I can't remember most of the year anyway! I guess I'll just remember what I can.



I have been in THREE plays this year! Pretty cool eh? The first one was *Les Miserables*, which I did in February. The second one I did in the summer: *Aladdin Jr.* It was a summer camp thing but way cooler, and it was at Keyano Theatre! The third play was *A Christmas Carol*, which was in November. I had a pretty

major role. My character was the ghost of Christmas Past. All the plays were really fun and exiting.

Oh, I forgot, I was also in a play/skit thing at my school. It was the first play in our school's history. It was called *Noel News* and I was the male news anchor, Old Man Winter. Look at all that writing, and that's all plays!

Anyway in December, I uploaded two videos to my YouTube channel. They were slightly scary but mostly funny horror films with my horse mask. You can check them out at www.youtube.com/user/TheEpicEnderTeam. I got a lot of good and funny feedback.



Also, one day, I was laying in my bed thinking about the Christmas holidays. And then I thought: I should build a blanket fort! The next day I started, then two days later I finished! It had Christmas lights and blanket flooring. It is a legitmate blanket fort.

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This year has been quite the rollercoaster for me. Early in 2014, I had a wonderful time being a part of Keyano Theatre's production of *Les Miserables*. It was a lovely experience I will never forget.

When it was coming time to register for grade 10 I knew something had to change. So this year I switched to Westwood Community High School and I am loving every minute of it. Westwood is very supportive in the arts which, (big suprise) is very important to me. Also, I met many wonderful people that welcomed me with open arms.



I recently performed in a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by William Shakespeare. I was so lucky to act with many great actors in this production, and I look forward to working with many of them in the future.



I continue to help out local organizations any way I can including the Fort McMurray Filmmakers Association, and a new association, the Fort McMurray Gaming Association.

This year has been an adventure. There have been bumps in the road and there have been times were I felt like I was in the ditch. But thanks to the support from my friends and the family, I am getting through it. Thanks to all the acting and projects I have done throughout the year. I feel like I have been able to really open up and be myself. I look forward to what 2015 will bring and being able to share my experience with you all.

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The picture below captures everything about 2014 for me. It was a leap of faith into a new world. From playing Thenardier in *Les Mis* to traveling to Yale and being inspired by the four MBA students in the picture at the top, from playing Scrooge to close out the year to finding my artistic voice with my wild colour portrait series, I feel incredibly blessed and inspired.



My work with the United Way is profoundly fulfilling, with great people and a great purpose. It is a pleasure to go to work each morning with people who are passionate about what they do and why they do it.

There are so many highlights to this year, but I will remember it as the time I began to see myself as an artist. I know that sounds a bit ridiculous considering the fact that I have been drawing, painting, acting, and writing for much of my life. But the eruption of portraits, that began with a mural of Metis elder Elsie Yank and continued with a dynamic collection of celebrities that even included the iconic wanderer from our hometown called "Bruno", I crossed into the world of entrepreneurship and found a hungry market for what I was (and am) creating. Apart from creating a very unexpected source of revenue, the paintings raised over \$7,000 for charity this fall. I'm equally shocked as I am delighted.

I am grateful for the support, encouragement and trust of my family in this most extraordinary year.

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Wow. What a year. As I read what I had written about 2013, I see some of the same themes popping up: enjoying life as much as possible, travel, working less and helping or serving more. Those same themes continue to be an integral part of my world - sometimes though one has to wait for the timing to be right and this year was definitely no exception.



I felt with the news of the surgery, the waiting for the surgery and the recovery period, much of my world had been put on hold. What I now know though is that there was good work happening in those spaces of time. I learned, I grew and I built the foundation of what (I hope) will be great things to come!

After the Spring Conference our mastermind group disbanded and travelled in separate ways. I enrolled in a major business course, learned a lot and have brought it back into my work with renewed excitement and inspiration. Though slow out of the gates, this Turtle is looking at great things to come with my own web-based mastermind groups, online programs and the opportunity to connect with and serve a broader group of people. I am no longer of the mindset that I desperately need to grasp at every person who approaches me and instead feel comfortable in screening for the right fit so that success (and less frustration) can be guaranteed. I am also learning about Ayurvedic Healing, something which I hope to incorporate into wellness opportunities for me and my clients.

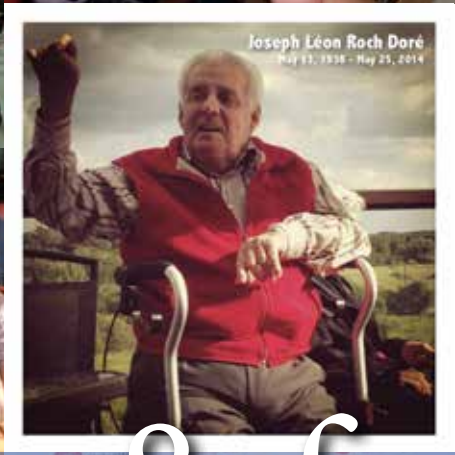
My new website says it all: www.heatherthomas.ca

I feel so grateful for Russell and the boys. Without them I would not have the supportive strength that cushions and holds me when I fall and that inspires me to pick myself up and move forward once more. I would not be where I am today without them. They are my greatest teachers and most stoic cheerleaders. It is them that matter most to me. We each support each other in turn and for this alone, I am ever so grateful.



My heart is open to receiving all that is good; an abundance of love, connection, creativity, inspiration, prosperity and good cheer. May you be blessed with the same and more. Love and Light - always and forever, Heather

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friends & family



Revel and Ben Thomas, as Ebenezer Scrooge and Christmas Spirit take the stage at Quebec Theatre and Arts Centre for an eight-week run of Dickens' Christmas Carol. See story on page A.