

2016 has been the longest year I can remember. The early events (basically anything before the October that really knocked me for six) seem like they happened a lifetime ago and a lot of the year has blurred into 'tired muddling through life somehow' with a few standout events. There have been several beautiful babies born within our 'village' (who sure aren't little babies any more!). We cried buckets at both the loss of a long-time family friend to her battle with cancer, and the unexpected death of a beautiful local friend taken far, far too soon. We attended weddings on the other side of the world, and went to the Edinburgh Tattoo on our side of the world. There were visitors from the UK at each end of the year as well as two full weeks of old friends & family while we were in the UK. Most of all, though, 2017 has been a year full of being a family, working out what we want to do with our lives, getting a bit of ourselves back, and watching the little people grow and change and learn so, so much.

Our 'village' has been absolutely invaluable this year, the support and friendship and help and love they surround us with is unbelievably strong and there is no way we could be where we are without them. We put a lot of work into finding our village when we arrived, and it has developed considerably over the last nearly-5 years. It takes a village to raise a family. This is 100% true. They've picked up the pieces when we were falling apart, encouraged us, celebrated with us, babysat for us, brought late night icecream and donuts, listened to us brag, and so many other little, every day things throughout the year. They are amazing.

We've all had an up and down year, and I think we can say without doubt it's the hardest year we've ever faced both individually and as a family, and I am incredibly proud that we made it through to the other end (see:village). A two year old's world is hard enough to navigate without adding a new person into the family and changing it all again, after all. And on top of that, navigating the first year of that second little person's life, from baby to crawler to toddler, with developmental leaps, and teeth, and learning how our new little person thinks and works and likes things to be as well. We knew it would be hard, we were prepared for it to be hard, and oh, it was.

Work was a life-saver for me, most of the time. I am so fortunate to have a job I love, and a team and manager that work so well together, allowing me to do what I need to do, how I need to do it without putting any extra pressure on me – but we all have hard months. We all struggle, and we all have to push through it any way we can sometimes. There are a couple of months that stand out as 'hard' because not only was home hard (because it has been all year, the nature of family life with two small children), but work was too. And I am so proud of myself that I did come out the other side and I have finally found the energy to get back to dancing and walking as well. "*I can and I will*" states one of my bracelets. I can, and I will, and I *did*, and hopefully I can continue that in 2017.

Pete has worked so incredibly hard this year and I am so proud of him. He has spent many evenings reviewing games for two different websites, sometimes having multiple games going at once. He does this on top of a full-time job, and a lot of parenting while I'm out at work (so, so much appreciated by me) – including taking on Chloe's Blueberries dance class when we switched daycare days! He worked even harder through soccer season co-coaching 2 men's teams and one women's team, and is looking forward to concentrating much more on playing in the 2017 season (whilst still coaching 'his' ladies!) with two little girls running up and down the sidelines. I must also give a shoutout to the soccer family that have spent so much time playing with the girls, cuddling them, and making sure they don't run onto the pitch!

Last but not least, our girls. Chloe and Lucy have both grown so much this year, as they continue to charm the socks off everyone they meet with their infectious smiles, making new friends rapidly and happily across the world. Chloe is challenging, independent, bright, vivacious, highly extravert and sees the world as a stage to shine brightly on - and shine she does. Lucy is incredibly determined and sure of what she wants, super snuggly, and really lights up to music (especially singing) and books. She also

climbs everything in sight! They have made good use of the playspaces we've carved out of the house and garden this year, which have been constantly developing to keep up with them! We changed their daycare in October, and they have both blossomed at the new centre with new people and spaces to explore and grow and learn some more. They can go from pulling each others' hair to hugs and kisses and giggling crazily at their current game with surprising rapidity. Chloe loves to help us, and is very proud of being bigger than Lucy. She loves her movies, and loves to sing and chatter her way through the world with her dollies. Lucy just likes to be around us, she will happily sit on me, ignoring me completely, and play with a book while Chloe asks me to watch her latest dance steps. They have very full days, keep us busy and get us up early, but the pay-off is (mostly) peaceful evenings, so we'll take it.

The world has produced some seemingly crazy decisions this year. Brexit, Pauline Hanson, and Donald Trump speak of countries crying out for change from the current way of running things, and people prepared to vote for something that seems ridiculous because they are promising a change – any change. So far, all we've actually seen is a lot of bluff and uncertainty, but 2017 promises to be, um, interesting. My promise to myself is to not be a bystander. To not say nothing, but wherever possible to spread love, say something, do something, whatever I can to help keep the world focussed on loving each other, doing right by each other and sweeping the feet out from under the hate movements that have started to pop up.

So, enough looking back, it's time to look forward. 2017 holds a lot of promise, a lot of potential and a lot more growing up for our little girls. 2016 was the year of '*I can and I will*'. 2017 is the year for '*Dream it, wish it, do it*'. Bring it on, 2017. We're ready for you.