



December, 2025  
Harrelson Family  
Spartanburg, SC

*Dear Friends and Family,*

As another year draws to a close, we find ourselves grateful for what we call ordinary miracles from early mornings that keep arriving, children who keep growing, questions that deepen rather than resolve, and the quiet grace of being held together when life feels both full and fragile.

2025 was a year of settling and stretching for our family. After returning to Spartanburg last year, this one felt like learning how to *live* here by finding rhythms, friendships, and places that are beginning to feel like home (especially our “other” home at Fretwell with its beloved Fred the Dog). From summer baseball games at The Spartanburgers’ new stadium to Rail Trail walks to Scouts hikes at our local Revolutionary War parks, we’re re-cultivating the roots that we both planted in Spartanburg decades ago. Our local ecology and backyard trees continue to mark the seasons for us, shedding and standing, teaching patience better than any book ever could, a year after Hurricane Helene.

One of the highlights of the year was traveling together to Washington, DC, New York City, and New Haven, CT (where we visited Yale with the children) to celebrate Merianna’s graduation from the TIDEL Fellows Program at Union Theological Seminary in Manhattan. The trip was a gift of time together in museums, on city streets, with sidewalk hot dogs and falafel, long conversations in the car, and the deep satisfaction of marking an accomplishment that represents years of faithful, thoughtful work.

Merianna continues to offer her gifts as a spiritual director, pastor, and teacher. In the coming year, she is stepping into a new role at First Presbyterian Spartanburg as the Director of Youth and Family Ministries, a space where her attentiveness, wisdom, and steady presence will be a true blessing. Watching her live into this calling with both courage and gentleness has been one of the year's great joys.

Sam's days have been shaped largely by doctoral work at CIIS in Ecology, Spirituality, and Religion, with reading, writing, teaching, and spending a lot of time outside thinking with trees. The work is demanding and surprisingly sustaining, and he's increasingly convinced that paying attention to the more-than-human world is not a retreat from responsibility but a way to learn to love more truthfully. He's also continued consulting work alongside his studies, keeping one foot in the digital world and the other firmly in the soil.



This year brought big transitions for our oldest girls. Mary-Hudson turned eighteen and began her work in Ski Patrol and EMS services, stepping into a life of service, responsibility, and care for others with courage and clarity. Laura, now fifteen, is in high school and driving (a sentence we're still getting used to writing). She brings creativity, humor, and a growing independence that keeps us both proud and occasionally breathless.

Ben turned ten and seems to be standing right at the threshold between little-kid wonder and something more reflective. He's curious, funny, and increasingly thoughtful, especially when it comes to animals, nature, and how things work (and his ever-growing LEGO collections). Emmylou, now six, brings sparkle and fierce creativity wherever she goes. She's reading more, asking big questions, and announcing strong opinions with confidence and delight while sharing her view of the world through her photography.

Lily is two and very much herself already, with a joyful, determined, affectionate, and always on the move soul. She keeps us laughing and tired in equal measure. Watching the older kids care for her, negotiate with her, and delight in her small discoveries has been one of the sweetest gifts of the year.

As a family, we're learning to hold a wide, beautiful range of relationships, responsibilities, and callings with honesty and care. We're grateful for family and friends who walk alongside us, for communities that welcome complexity, and for love that continues to expand rather than contract.

As this year comes to a close, we wish you rest, warmth, and moments of true presence. May the coming year bring you steadiness where things feel uncertain, joy where you least expect it, and companions who help you pay attention to what really matters.

*With love and gratitude,*

**Sam, Merianna,**

**Mary-Hudson, Laura,**

**Ben, Emmylou, and Lily**