

# 2023, A Year Contemplated

Joshua Kilpatrick | December 2023 | [Index](#)

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It's hard to conjure the Joshua of 2022. As often is the case, the passing of a year has changed many things. In many ways, I feel more stable and happy, but in others, more disoriented and lost. The year started with a recovery from a mild depression, reached its middle with crushing news about Antonio's visa, and concluded with a wonderful party celebrating our marriage - a blend of happy and sad moments for which I am grateful. As I contemplate the year gone by and imagine the one to come, I feel a bit frustrated. I hope this sense of self disappointment will catapult me into more ordered actions to construct a life to my liking in 2024, but I also desire to defeat this self disappointment by calming my mind and reducing the pressure I feel to "do something". In truth, I've accomplished many great things in the past year, and there is cause for great pride.

## Reviewing 2023

As it would happen, I started 2023 on a rebound from an intense depressive episode unlike anything I've experienced in over a decade. Around June of 2022 I initiated a plan to adjust my depression medicines. My goal was to reduce or eliminate one of my medicines (Bupropion) which was difficult to purchase in Mexico. Unfortunately, as I reduced my doses over a 5 month period, my personality and mood began to change in ways that made me very uncomfortable. At the end of the experiment - the end of 2022 - I was sometimes passing days on the sofa exhausted and recoiling at even the smallest demands on my time. It had become difficult to enjoy the company of Antonio and friends, and I felt completely unmotivated. In late October 2022, I visited my local psychiatrist and together we decided to reinstate my original doses. By the new year 2023, I was feeling much better, but the lingering effects of depression stayed with me for the first months of the year.

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## The Visa Rejection

As I contemplated 2023 during New Years celebrations, the majority of my focus was on organizing to move back to the United States with Antonio by 2024. With most of my energy focused on visiting the USA, a big milestone of 2023 was our planned trip to Merida for Antonio's visa appointment. After 18 months of waiting, we were ecstatic to be in the final stages of the visa process. We decided to make a vacation of the experience and spent 4 nights in Merida. We visited some amazing cenotes around Merida and loved walking down the historic Paseo de Montejo. Everything seemed perfect until Monday morning (June 5, 2023) when Antonio reported to his visa interview only to be rejected. We were crushed. The consulate gave a generic reason for the decision which basically said Antonio had *failed to demonstrate sufficiently strong ties to his home country*. They call this a 214(b) visa denial, which is a reference to section 214(b) of the Immigration and Nationality Act. In later analysis, I came to the conclusion that the rejection was caused by some mix of factors including his age, marital status, and lack of property ownership. I think younger, teens and college-aged, Mexicans with ties to their university and dependence on their families are often approved as well as older Mexicans with established lives (properties, marriages, children) in Mexico. Unfortunately, Antonio was classified as risky due to his limited ties - no wife, no property. Though it seems implausible, I also wondered if the consulate was sophisticated enough to review all our social media and determine we were a couple. Perhaps he was rejected because of me. Maybe it seemed that we planned to marry each other and remain in the US one day, when really, we just wanted to visit so I could introduce him to my hometown and friends.

After a few weeks of feeling totally deflated, we began to discuss our alternatives. I had my heart set on leaving Playa del Carmen by the end of 2023. I had reached my limit with the repetitive nature of tourist-town lifestyle and the constant heat and humidity of the Caribbean. We needed a new plan that would get us back on track to visit and one day live in the USA together. I also needed to find relief from the heat and change my perspective from "waiting" to "living". At that moment, I had been living in Mexico over 2 years and at least half of that time felt like a waiting game for Antonio's Visa. I didn't want to continue accepting a static, waiting game, approach to my life; so, around July, we decided that we would get married in Mexico a little sooner than we had planned.

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## The Wedding

The second half of 2023 was filled with planning and celebration. We were married on the 31 of August 2023 at the Civil Registry in Playa del Carmen. It was a simple ceremony with 4 witnesses - Gachi, Xochitl, James, and Guido. We popped a bottle of sparkling wine after the ceremony and enjoyed a late afternoon lunch at a wine shop with kitchen service. It was a very happy day. By September we had all the paperwork ready to apply for our spousal visa and mailed the papers on the 22nd of that month. Then on the 11th of November 2023 we hosted our families and friends here at our home in Kumarú to celebrate the marriage with style. We served a lovely dinner, hired a singer and mariachi, and danced the night away. It was everything I could have hoped.

We capped off 2023 with a 2 week vacation in Oaxaca. It was Antonio's first time to visit Oaxaca. We toured Oaxaca City, visited Mexico City for a weekend with family, and then toured the most popular beaches on the coast including the famous Zipolite known for its gay culture and nudism. We even stayed in a nudist hotel! I was proud of our flexibility and unity as we explored our sexual life together.

2023 was a year of recovery, disappointment, and great peaks of happiness. I am proud of all that we accomplished, but as I turn the final pages on my 46th year (I turned 47 in November), the predominate feeling is dissatisfaction. The root of this emotion is in myself. I had hoped my retired life would present missions and opportunities to explore more of my talents and passions. If I am indeed on that road, I will say the progress has been slower than I hoped, and I'm getting scared that I'm wasting time. Though I've tried several small experiments - a YouTube channel, a home bakery, writing, and consulting work - I continue to feel lost. I've found a grand love in Antonio, my husband, and the opportunities for the future seem very bright, but finding vocation and meaning is still confounding me.

## Hits and Misses

It is important to highlight successes and challenges/mistakes that impacted the year. If I'm not fully satisfied, I want to understand contributing factors and lessons I can learn.

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### A Ski Accident (miss)

The mistake that impacted me most was a skiing accident. The combination of skiing terrain beyond my level of preparation and being cavalier about the dangers of a new ski area resulted in a serious fall that bruised my thigh and damaged my shoulder. The accident occurred in February 2023 when I visited the United States for my annual winter ski trip. I planned a trip to Canada with the Ski Buddies. The terrain and local life were amazing, but the trip was not without its challenges. I lost a tire while driving over a snowy Canadian pass and was stranded for 24 hours in a small town waiting for a tire repair. When I arrived at the resort a day late, I was eager to jump into skiing at a high level, and I made the mistake of riding up the mountain with the most expert skiers of my group. In the past, while living in the northwest and skiing regularly all season, I think I would have easily skied at their level, but after 2 years of less regular mountain activities, I had lost a lot of conditioning.

I survived my first run with the advanced group, but I had skied beyond my level of preparation and wisely decided to part ways with them. I skied alone for a while and then headed back to the cabin exhausted and on my own. During the trip back to the cabin, I mis-interpreted the trail and ended up riding over a 5-foot drop down to a frozen parking lot. I landed hard on my left hip bruising it deeply and caught my fall with my left arm, over extending my shoulder and re-injuring it. The next days were miserable as I tried to keep my spirits up while I was in a lot of pain.

When I returned home to Mexico, I continued to nurse my hip for over two months and to this day, I have visible internal scar tissue at the site of the injury. My shoulder took over 6 months to repair, and affected my goals to increase exercise and activity in 2023. Ultimately, I did heal and dramatically improved my frequency of exercise, but the year got off to a rough start physically and mentally. The entire experience has left me with a new appreciation of my body and the real necessity to protect it. Now past my mid-forties, I can't count on my body to rebound from injury and

accidents easily. The high cost of my mistake this year motivates me to adopt a more cautious perspective - move more slowly and use my body with caution.

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## Contract Work in the Software World (miss)

For most of 2023, I worked as a contractor with Pathrise offering career counseling to software engineers. I enjoyed re-learning common programming questions and algorithms, but as the year wore on, I began to find the consulting very repetitive. Since I often only met with clients once or twice, I usually gave the same advice over and over. I also felt stressed when I needed to work with candidates who really weren't very well prepared or educated. I wanted to help give them guidance and answers, but often I came up short. I felt like it was my job to give them some game changing advice, but sometimes, there just wasn't much I could do. The repetitively and pressure to help unqualified people soured me on the work, and I plan to pause my contract in 2024.

Re-exposing myself to "American corporate culture" and its revolving door game of recruiting, hiring, and firing re-traumatized me a little. I felt two familiar emotions. First, the feeling I had when I worked for Mentor Graphics as a trade show representative. I would go to these trade shows to talk about Mentor's embedded operating system and debugger but I knew our product didn't have much to offer and that we were playing in the declining flip-phone industry that was dying. This year at Pathrise, I recoiled when faced with similar feelings of "selling a product that had nothing to offer people". The second familiar emotion was the degradation and competition of the software development industry where manager expect the moon and peers compete with you for recognition by trying to make you look less intelligent. As I coached and tried to help job seekers understand the mentality of hiring managers and teams, I was sickened by the reality I needed to embody in order to help these job seekers. The experience fortified my belief that re-starting a meaningful vocational life probably won't involve using my technology skills. The reality is that the my tech knowledge is so deep and the field so complicated, that I struggle to connect people across the gulf of ignorance. Maybe I need to contribute in an area where I don't feel like such an expert.

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## Rebooting my Fitness (hit)

Despite the setback of a physical injury early in the year, with Antonio's help I committed to visiting the gym multiple times a week. He and I settled into a nice routine that helped me heal my body and improve my fitness. I'm proud of the new routine we constructed together, and I look forward to continue it in 2024. I'd like to continue the level of activity we've achieved while modifying my diet for better weight maintenance.

In 2023, my primary dietary focus was on reducing my alcohol intake, and though I still often drink too much, I think I have significantly increased the number of days each week when I drink no alcohol. I'd like to continue this trend in 2024 and further reduce my consumption to less than 10 drinks per week consistently.

Consistency and pacing were very important to this year's success. A friend of mine who lost a lot of weight in 2023 with dieting shared that his secret was patience and grace. The most important aspect is to keep trying and struggling with the goal. I need not insist on perfection for my efforts to be meaningful. I will continue to pursue exercise adapted for my age, focus on light and achievable goals, and hold my plans lightly. The key is not to eliminate failures but to eliminate guilt. Always get back up and keep chipping away at the task.

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## Spanish Studies (hit)

My journey with Spanish has continued and I am proud of my progress. This year, I developed a successful intermediate study group which met weekly to practice reading short stories and translating. From a meager start of 2 to 3 people, the group grew to over 8 regulars. The weekly social time brought me enjoyment and was fortified by my own progress. I can say that I almost never struggle to understand people in conversations and my ability to express myself has improved.

In 2023, I found pleasure reading a success. I completed three books.

- A través de la lluvia, Ariana Godoy ([amazon](#))
- El murmullo de las abejas, Sofía Segovia ([amazon](#))

- Huracán, Sofía Segovia ([amazon](#))

I have learned use reading as a tool to expand vocabulary and reemphasize Spanish sentence formation while enjoying myself, but I feel I will need to return to rote practice using my Rocket Spanish course, flash cards, and grammar lessons to fortify my spoken expression in more complex tenses.

## **2024 Vision**

In 2023, our vision of visiting the United States as a couple was blocked by US immigration laws and bad luck. Though the disappointment caused by the outcome was uncomfortable, it ultimately lead us to accelerate our long-term plans to get married and laid the foundations for our 2024 plans. Even before we were married, I contracted a US immigration assistance firm to help us prepare our application for a spousal (IR1/CR1) visa.

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### Get the Spousal Visa

In September our visa application was received by the United States Customs and Immigration Service (USCIS), and we expect a decision by June 2024. Once approved, we can proceed to consular processing of the visa which requirers a medical exam, additional documentation, and an in person appointment in Ciudad Juarez, México. Because of backups in the consulates since the COVID pandemic, this second step of processing is expected to last another 8 to 10 months. If the process proceeds as anticipated, we will be able to enter the US as a married couple in the Summer of 2025.

Though the availability of the spousal visa provides new opportunities for us to visit and live in the US together, as much of the US immigration system, the procedures are long and inhuman. As a citizen, having my family treated this way by my government has been a bitter awakening. In addition to being offensive, it has also extended the amount of time I must wait in Mexico with Antonio.

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### Get Out of Playa del Carmen

I have decided if we need to spend another year and a half in México, I'd like to feel we are moving life forward with new experiences. I'm also strongly motivated by the hot tropical climate of the Yucatan Peninsula to find a part of México with fresher weather. We plan to spend 2024 doing some travel. We will leave for Guadalajara in late January and plan to spend 3 months in Jalisco. In May, we will fly to Madrid and spend 3 months experiencing life in Spain. As we return to México in August, we hope to have an appointment for consular processing and an understanding of when we will acquire the visa. If we need to wait another 10 months as we expect, we will rent in a town in central México (Guadalajara, Querétaro, Puebla, or Oaxaca).

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### Advance Our Vocational Life

Though we plan to travel more in 2024, I'd like the year to be productive for our vocations. Antonio would like to explore online drafting work, and I'd like to advance my Spanish from B2 to C1 while volunteering. I hope that in Guadalajara and Madrid, I can experiment more with volunteering and take some advanced, in-person Spanish classes.

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### Continue with Fitness

My fitness and mobility have improved in 2023, but I still have not recovered the resting weight of my career. I'd like to lose between 5 and 10 kilograms of body weight (from 79kg to 70kg) in the first half of 2024. To achieve this, I want to create more mobility in my life through walking, dancing, and skating - a hobby in which Antonio has expressed interest. I think I will continue my weekly gym routine with Antonio while trying to add additional movement based activities into my life. To support this goal, I've considered reshaping my morning contemplative routines to eliminate my time spent on the sofa reading. I might substitute this time with a morning walking routine where I can still quiet my mind, but start moving earlier in the day. I have also considered canceling my subscriptions to the New York Times in favor of listening to NPR podcasts while walking. As I move my life away from media consumption, I hope to do more long-form reading and spend more time moving. I'm also hopeful that cutting my media diet might improve my outlook and happiness. Whatever the



technique, I think I need to spend less time thinking about getting back on the sofa or at my desk. I need to transition away from desk life and into a new way of using my time. There has almost been a compulsion in me to return to my desk and “do something useful”. I don’t feel that this vision of “usefulness” is serving me.

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## Make a Dent in my Creative Writing Goals

Despite my goals to transition away from desk-life and “thought work”, I don’t want to completely leave my areas of training. I’d like to complete some written works in 2024. Even if I only produce small short stories or essays, I’d like to make some progress in trying my hand at this art. My chief goal is to produce some creative works. I might explore visual art and dance, but I suspect writing will be the most satisfying because it at least has a chance to be consumed and appreciated by others.

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## Convert Into a Sober Life

Parallel to my fitness and body presence goals, I feel the time has come to dramatically reduce the regularity of my alcohol consumption. I’d like to achieve a rhythm of drinking twice a month and a maximum of 4 drinks per night. This year, new evidence and recommendations from the health community have debunked some of the popular belief that moderate alcohol use can be overall positive for your health. The latest thought is that even a little alcohol damages cells and hurts your health. I can certainly say that I feel my body aging. My heart rhythm, the appearance of my skin, eye sight, hearing, and muscle skeletal discomfort have all worsened. I hope that loosing weight can help with inflammation and pain, and I think dropping alcohol and the companion vice of social smoking, can improve my life. Over the past years, I’ve also convinced myself this will require lifestyle change. I won’t be able to socialize in the same ways as I have been since my mid-twenties. Thinking back, I recall that social alcohol use really took root when I was 23 and starting to enjoy drinking after work with my Nortel friends. I think my drinking remained pretty light until I returned to Mobile where my harder drinking friends accelerated my consumption. If these estimates are right, I’ve been drinking daily for 20 years. I don’t know the exact path, but I need to keep trying.

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## Make a Commitment to Romance

Entering our fourth year of dating and first year of marriage in 2024, I see that there is work ahead to develop healthy habits that nourish our romance and erotic appreciation of one another. Writing love notes and creating special moments of romance are two ideas. I have to resist the corrosive effects of routine life that can blur erotic opportunity. In 2024, I'd like to try to celebrate our couple holidays as extensively as possible - Valentines day (14 of February), dating anniversary (2 of May), wedding anniversary (31 of August and 11 of November), and birthdays (2 of October). I think writing cards, buying flowers, planning dates, and setting up special sexual opportunities are some good starter ideas. The goal is to exercise traditions, storytelling, and memory making to nurture romance. Somehow, I've lost some interest in traditions preferring to mold my life into a consistent set of unchanging routines imagined to maximize convenience, but in the past years, I'm seeing the cracks and stupidity in this plan. We are animals and we need effort, novelty, and surprise.

The year of 2023 has been a year of settling into retired life and seeing its ugly underbelly. My aging body has presented new challenges and presents a necessary challenge to change my physical lifestyle. My failure to find happiness and community by mimicking the desk bound life of my career necessitates a new way of thinking about the physicality of life and my need for exposure to external stimulus. I'm not ready to totally abandon my "dreams" of creating a creative outlet for consumption by others, but I need to stop living my daily life with a guilt that urges me back to my contemplative sofa/desk. As I enter 2024 as a married man, my relational dreams have never been more definitively fulfilled. I have the prototype of all I've imagined in Antonio, and now it's time to put the rubber to the road and build the life I conjure in my imagination.