



Greetings all:

A lot to talk about this year, so let's get down to it!

Pretty much a year of records in the Pacific Northwest. Record hot and dry summer, followed by a record rainfall in October, topped off with record cold in November. To balance this, all of our professional sports teams have been average at best.

It turned into a year of record travel for us as well. I spent a solo week back in Ohio last April visiting family on my side of the tree. Although the county roads are many, it's hard to get lost when you can still see your starting point five miles later. Then we packed up the entire tribe (less dog) for the customary week in southern California to visit Nancy's side in July. Breaking with the Thanksgiving travel tradition, I was reminded how hot it got there during the summer time. This was closely followed by a tightly packed scenic drive to Utah to see my youngest sister get married. Lot's of quality travel time with the kids. Probably a little too much.

I sold the '66 Mustang (gasp), and the '74 Powerwagon (sniffle), and we now have a 2003 Ram Quad Cab that barely fits in the garage and gets thirteen miles to the gallon (argh). It would appear the stars must have finally aligned, or after ten years Nancy finally wore me down. Sure, we can now do extended trips all in one vehicle. But after having a toddler kicking the back of the seat throwing cracker crumbs in my hair, I've definitely pondered the wisdom of the decision and the intangible value of antiquated vehicles. But at least we got the Hemi and big manly tow mirrors.

Mitch is a growing boy that is going to cost us a lot of money. He seems bent on just destroying everything he can reach (which is more and more every day). He's been more active in the last year and a half than Jaclyn was in her first five. I'm actually hoping he'll go against his genetic disposition and become active in sports. Maybe that will burn up some energy. In the meantime, chasing him around normally keeps Nancy and I trim and fit.

Jaclyn is in the first grade now and making the most of it. With a steady diet of school, homework, Brownie activities, play time, and some kind of processed chicken, she keeps a pretty busy schedule. Obviously her occasional claims of being 'bored' fall on deaf ears. I was able to get her to do a couple of hikes with me locally this year; unfortunately the weather usually doesn't cooperate and she gets tired of talking to me after a couple of miles in the pouring rain. With a little luck we can sneak in a real backpack this spring.

Nancy's employer for the last five years, Royal-Sun Alliance, is closing its doors due a buyout and displacing yet more seasoned insurance professionals. Although most of the staff nationwide will be let go by the end of the year, she will stay in her capacity thru at least mid 2004. Safeco has not been immune to the overall consolidation of the insurance



industry either, as my ten years with the company is starting to see loyalty fade on both sides. Corporate and IT departments are dwindling in the now commonplace world of expense slashing and outsourcing, and those of us that missed the big layoffs last October still need to contend with what will be a very unstable year. Our next annual letter might be very different indeed.

There are still a lot of outdoor activities going on, including my now commonplace annual 'camps.' Fish Camp in January produced no fish due to a hungry orca pod in the Hood canal, but crabs were abundant. Snow camp was re-dubbed Rain Camp, as we got pummeled by heavy March storms logging miles on the rocky and desolate Olympic Coast in search of old shipwreck sites. Although the big hills have been few and far between, a Mt St Helens summit materialized mid-May with unusually severe winter-like whiteout conditions. Water bottles froze along with a couple of fingertips, but the feeling always returns after a couple of weeks when the skin falls off. Only got out a couple of times car camping this year. The White Pass family outing was a raging success, with nine children, ten adults, several dogs, and ample firewood & cold beer. Nancy and I also made our twice a decade sojourn to Crater Lake National Park for our tenth wedding anniversary. First time in five years away from the kids for a weekend. Weather was perfect, and except for the smoke from forest fires, it looked the same as when we were first married (.....and full of hopes and dreams).

Only squeezed in two backpacks this year. One was the Northern Loop on the flanks of Mt. Rainier. I have to say it was fifty plus of some of the hardest miles I've ever humped under 8k feet. Or maybe it was the nearly 10k in gain and loss. Or the oppressive and unseasonable heat. Or the bee-sting I got the second day that made my calf swell up to the size of my thigh and caused dehydration from the steady tears that poured out of my eyes. But the mermaids of Mystic Lake made the pain fade, as well as the now mandatory burger and beer at the nearest town.

The second outing was the famed Enchantments in the Cascades around Leavenworth. The permit system is ultra restrictive and deters many from this breathtaking area, but this year we took a gamble and hit a perfect five day window in mid-September (a gift by any measure). The miles were good, the granite glacier-polished, the snow wind-blown, and the tamaracks in full autumn gold against countless high alpine lakes. The vertical miles in to the upper basin didn't seem all that bad once we dropped our packs.

All in all, a pretty busy year. To fill in the spare slivers of time, there's been a lot of landscaping and miscellaneous house projects going on. It's been nine years since we became homeowners, so I keep telling myself there can't be that much left.....

Wishing you and yours a happy holiday season.

Dave, Nancy, Jaclyn, Mitchell