

2004

How-Deeeeeeee

Sometimes three hundred and sixty five days just doesn't seem to be enough to make up a year. But then again, as the family interests expand exponentially, I'm generally following the calendar instead of making it. Where did the year go? It feels s like I just wrote one of these mini-novels yesterday. Since everybody is in a greater and greater hurry every holiday season, I'll start out with some highlights to try and tease you into finishing the annual State of the Wings speech.

Nancy spent 74 days traveling out of state for work this year, while I spent 26 nights (between backpack trips and car camps) sleeping in the cold and rain instead of a perfectly good house. So although we've been married 11 years, it really feels more like eight, which effectively buys us more time until we get fed up with each other. At least on paper. I also found out how much 17,000 pounds *really is*. Per the scale slips from our little landscape project, that is how much dirt, sand, rock, and pavers I physically moved by hand and wheel barrow. Friends were few and far between for this summer endeavor, but they turned out in droves last Christmas to gawk at the fir tree that fell on the house. State Farm paid out just over \$10,000 on the claim, which I'm sure they will bleed out of us in increased premiums. Of course you can't get blood from a stone, and I just topped the five gallon mark with my regular donations at work for the local blood bank. Good health and a half hour investment every couple of months has turned me into a virtual giving cow of life (that thrives on free cookies and apple juice).

Now for gory details. Last year Nancy found out her company (Royal/Sun Alliance) was sold and she'd be looking for a new job. Well, she took the stay put (to the bitter end) package, and her last day is 12/17. At least we can't say we didn't see it coming. She is looking for a similar position in premium audit with other major insurance carrier in the northwest region, and hopefully can secure something with less travel. I'm still working in the IT department at Safeco in quality assurance. The last five years have been full of changes, and we have not been immune to the many threats facing anyone with a career in IT. But my background and strength is primarily in the insurance industry, and I'm looking for a move within the company or elsewhere that will better align me exercising those skills. We still have our second house in Spokane. With the housing market out of control in Puget Sound, we might be revisiting that much talked about move to the far side of the state. The lure of money is slowly being eroded by quality of life.

The new (now old) Dodge has been fitting in well with the family needs. It's a towing, hauling, people carrying machine and should last us many years. The first ding put a tear in my eye. The first dent caused quite a bit of profanity. The only low note it that for the first time we now spend more in fuel to go camping than beer. I don't see being able to change that for the perceivable future, unless I host a bachelor party the in the woods. But it still carried me thru the normal round of manly outings this year. Sno Camp was up at Hurricane Ridge, and was hands down the best ever. The weather window was perfect, and we got in great snow shoeing at high elevation with views of Victoria and the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

The awaited spring hike east of the mountains was called last minute because of lingering snow, so we had four days to plan the mother of all lowland hikes: All 52 thru miles of the Olympic Coast including arranging car drops and shuttles. We started the five day quest with deteriorating weather and dismal forecast, but as with all extended hikes, it eventually got better (after the point of no return). Between racing the tides, fording rivers, lancing blisters, and counting the shipwreck memorials, it was a hearty achievement and a memorial trip. We finished off fall with a thru four day outing up on the shoulder of massive Mt Stuart. We encountered driving rain, then freezing snow, then early winter sun. The azure sky against fresh snow and the golden needles of the larch made the trip.

The truck kept up with the family adventures as well, in spite of Nancy's Gulliver's travel schedule. We were able to take a couple of weekend trips to the dryer east side of the pass, including a 4th of July weekend over on Priest Lake (ID). This is a truly area with some great potential I think we will be making our way back to more often. Nancy and I also got away from the kids and explored the West Kootenys in southeast British Columbia (as my parents kindly baby sat). We got in a couple of trail miles during the long weekend and I love the south eastern BC geography. Plus the people are almost as funny as their money. We did a family trip to California to visits Nancy's family over spring break. Disneyland and California Adventure have now been formally marked off the "to do" list for a couple of years, so I'll be able to relax the next time we go down there.

In the spirit of the outdoors, Jac and I logged several daddy/daughter campouts, mostly during the winter time exploring various state parks that have been created out of decommissioned coastal defense artillery forts. Nothing quite like walking atop 100 year old concrete bunkers and watching a storm blow in from the sea. Needless to say, we built big fires. We also did Valentine's Day weekend on Orcas Island in the San Juans. Winter was in full force, and we almost got blown off the highest point of the island during our hike, but a good time nonetheless. Jaclyn is a Brownie, which is driving some of these outdoor activities. In order to be more involved with her troop and teaching camping skills, I went to an outdoor leadership workshop for trainers this fall. Of course, no one told me I was the only guy camping for two nights with 40 middle-aged house moms. It made for some interesting mornings since the showers were shut off for the season. Sure, I got my own tent platform, but I quickly found out the hardest thing to find at a Girl Scout camp is a men's room. I didn't know how much work it was keeping in check my stereotypical Neanderthal inner self. At least I got some nifty patches to sew on my sash.

Nancy had a little repair time this year. Between lasik for her eyes, a little heart issue, and carpal tunnel surgery for her wrist, I was definitely thinking of just throwing on new tires and going for a trade in. But the miles are pretty much highway, and the style lines for that particular year have always been pleasing to the eye, so I guess this is more a choice of the heart. Besides, I got to see some real carnage at the demolition derby that I affectionately have come to call my twenty year high school class reunion last summer. Small towns are known for taking you back in time (because things never change), and second hand smoke. And I got 20 years worth of each. It was really great to connect with some people, but participation was unusually lacking (kind of hard to round people up on four weeks notice) and my project management skills might kick into gear the next go around. I've always done some of my best work following up a disaster (because everything is relative).

Mitch is a rising star in his own way, although I would compare him to a cross between the Tasmanian devil and a black hole (since he systematically destroys everything before it disappears forever). His hands are as busy as his mouth, and I haven't quite figured out how to pull the plug on the bed time power surge he somehow is able to muster. He's been maintaining at least a half a dozen bruises on his body at all times, hands are a constant blur, and somehow he's gotten the idea that the family dog is a pony. I figure we have a small window left to put some real parental fear into him or he's gone for good. Walla Walla is a federal correction center, right?

That should hold everyone until next year. Best wishes for the Holidays.

Dave & Nancy, Jaclyn and Mitchell