

2006

Seasons Greetings

Everything is just too green. No, I'm not talking about mistletoe, noble firs, elf outerwear (or elf-ette foundation wear), or the ink on Home Depot gift cards. I'm referring to the moss pushing my roof shingles apart, the three tons of rotting leaves and storm debris in the yard, and that undefined goo I've pulled out of the gutters for the sixth time this winter. We just closed the books on the wettest month in Seattle's recorded history: 15 1/2 inches of liquid sky is 30 dark days (the last three as a wonderful snowstorm). I hope Santa picked up a new slicker and put some fresh wipers on the sleigh this year.

It's been another year and another dozen tales of changing careers, children chaos, comical woe, and prematurely wearing out knee cartilage. The kids are getting older and, as expected, the pace of life is picking up a little bit. This was a year of family travel: locally, across time zones, and some long summer days communing with the great outdoors. I didn't get to any major home improvement projects, so don't bother scanning for tips on setting up your chop saw for those tricky crown molding compound miter cuts. But I did pick up a lathe for turning, so there might be some salad bowl know-how if I have space.

Let's start with the fun stuff. As a whole, we got in a fair amount of camping this year. The summer started on the Duckabush and ended on the Coweman. Sure, funny names for those not from this side of the state, but there were some pretty funny times too. Every trip had a story: there was tube floating, slow-cooked ribs, semi automatic weapons, and there were some great lies spun around a blazing and equally great campfire deep into the Northwest night. We took out the tent trailer mostly, but we have been experimenting with the one room family tent. This is a part of the ongoing effort to get 1,500 pounds of 'back to nature' gear packed tighter in the Dodge for extended sojourns across state lines (i.e., week-long Nat'l Park family road trips, destined to echo with the timeless screams of 'stop touching me' and 'don't make me stop this car'). But for the time being, the kids got in a lot of swimming hole time and running barefoot through the forest with the usual pack we customarily camp with. I hope we're making some good memories for kids, or at least lowering their expectations for living in the real world in another nine to fourteen years (fingers crossed).

[For the out-of-car camping experiences, there is a new supplemental addendum to this season. It was a great year in hiking: I laughed, I cried, I shrugged. Please recycle if my tales of glorious failures and triumphant tragedies aren't your cup of tea.]

But there was a little air travel as well. In May I went to Salt Lake City to attend my youngest sister's graduation. We now have a PHD in the family (nutrition and sports science). She probably can't set a broken leg, but at least she can tell me how much salt should be in my diet as I whine in pain. The 4th of July was spent east of the mountain visiting family and friends and enjoying the sun, something we have been a little short of the last dozen years in the Boeing bedroom community of Renton. That was followed up by a week long trip to the nation's small state: Rhode Island. And who says big things don't come in small packages? Well, I'm thinking anyone from RI. This is the locale from whence Nancy's parents sprouted, and the natural place to have their 50th wedding anniversary. We visited a lot of family on Nancy's side and got to know the Ocean State quite well. Even enjoyed some East Coast rain, which I'm happy to report, feels pretty much the same as the West Coast stuff (it just ends eight months sooner).

As an extra bonus, we were just a scant 67 miles from Sandwich, MA, up on Cape Cod. That's where the first Wing knocked the dirt off of his Dutch clod hoppers back in the mid 1600's (about 20 years after Plymouth Rock). Sure enough we got to see the family house, known as the Wing Fort House, which is the oldest abode in New England to be lived in continuously by the same family (the last Wing moved out in 1943). Since there was never any indoor plumbing or electrical installed - where my thriftiness must be from - it's often visited by historians and archeologist alike to get a true picture of what American living was like through the last couple hundred years. Of course the flight there had issues galore (connection missed, short a seat for the squirming kicking wild-man Mitch, plane overweight because of too much fuel, I got split from the family and ended up in the middle of a huge special Olympics team returning from a meet in Iowa - as if I could make that one up). But we got home all in one piece, a little tired and wondering what the funny smell was in the house. Maybe someday we'll find the source.

The summer ended with what is becoming a Labor Day tradition: Wine

tasting in Eastern Washington (Tri-Cities area). Of course, there is a fine line between wine tasting and wine drinking, and then again just plain drinking. But with the waning summer sun and the kids splashing in a big blue swimming pool, it's something we look forward to re-discovering annually as the season winds down and school starts up

Ah, now for the annual catch up. I am still with Safeco, and it's been a pretty wild ride this last year. With a new CEO has come abrupt and sudden directional changes - in both the company and culture - leaving a lot of career choices out on the table. Kind of like an episode of that "Lost" show where you just can't wait to see what the monster in the forest is. After two major reorganizations, layoffs, and constant waves of consolidation, I find myself still with a position in IT. I'm now short the best manager I had ever had the privilege to work with at Safeco, and some employees I've known for longer than my kids. I've been hinting towards a directional career change for the last couple of holiday greetings, so my decisional inertia might finally have a little traction again. But I can say with a degree of certainty you'll be hearing more about this come next year. In the meantime, I'll be fitting the Dodge with some safari expedition equipment just in case some extended camping trips suddenly appear on the horizon.

Nancy has seen some work changes this year as well. Mutual of Enumclaw was not providing her with the professional challenge she needed, and her network of contacts turned up another opportunity. As of last February she came on board with the Premium Audit department at Safeco. Although on the surface this seems a little too close for comfort, our areas only indirectly touch and it's like working for two separate companies. She has proven herself to be the rising star amongst her peers and with her background and expertise in the field she could have a very long career regardless of the new direction the company takes. And there is nothing like having a big old Dodge Magnum station wagon with the Safeco logo emblazoned down the side parked in the driveway (just can't flip people off when I pass them anymore). Other than work, Nancy is still active with the PTA as the treasurer and has gotten in deep with the soccer moms. Oh, and speaking of soccer.....

Although there has never been a sports gene the survived birth in our branch of the family tree, Jaclyn has become quite involved in soccer. After two summer camps, joining a recreational team, and many many many practice sessions, her confidence is coming up and she's running up and down the field with the best of them (except when she plays goalie and puts on her big gloves and mean face). She is still active in Girl Scouts, Choir and a half dozen other school functions I don't know about. For a nine-year-old, Jac puts in more hours a week than I do at work. All I know is this sports stuff really cuts into the fall and winter father/kid camping schedule I normally work up, so I better start training Mitch on how to build a fire and ice down a cooler.

Speaking of Mitch, sports hasn't taken him away from me yet but he is growing big and strong. I have a feeling he'll be wearing a shirt with a number on it someday (and hopefully not one of those ten digit ones the state passes out). At four years old he has also done a little soccer, but it isn't his thing (at least not yet). And we only had to go into the emergency room once this year for stitches (again, in the head). No broken bones yet, but for some reason I have a feeling it's only a matter of time. I'm glad we get milk delivered to the house. His smile is infectious, his attention to detail a little scary in a Rain Man kind of way, and the 9 pm peak on his energy curve is getting a little tiresome. But as long as he has Thomas the Train in his pocket (or anyone one of his six well-marketed train buddies), all is good in his 40-inch world. We just have to stop him from trying to ride Cassie like a pony. I'm thinking that Labs are more tolerant than most parents.

Kintla's canine companion Cassie has become a part of the house now. She is a ball-fetching machine and very very patient with Mitch, her ever-taunting two-legged self-appointed pack leader. Between her and Kintla, we have a hundred and fifty pounds of dog constantly screaming for attention. And it seems like we pick up about 50 pounds of hair each week in the vacuum cleaner. I'm not a math genius or anything, but I'm thinking one good wind and they will both just unravel and blow away leaving us nothing but a pair of collars. Kintla is really showing her age now (12), and has the aches and pains you would expect. It's going to be a sad day when that decision has to be made.

Well, that's enough. Now I have to shrink the margins and play with the fonts to try and fit it all onto the magical single page and not cross a postal rate. I wish I were just a Christmas card name-signer. It would make my holiday season so much easier. Not that I'm calling anyone a slacker or anything.....

Best Wishes for the Season

Dave, Nancy, Jaclyn, Mitchell

Addendum: Dave's Mountain Man in Washington Review

As for hiking, it didn't really seem like I got that much in until I thumbed through the calendar. I spent something around 30+ days sleeping in something other than my own bed last year (excluding the sofa, of course). Holy cow! I must be in the midst of some middle age thing. Life is good.

Snow camp had the largest showing ever last January. The 12th Annual at that. I'd like to think it was because it happen to fall on my 40th birthday. Or the fact I brought along a dozen and a half interior hollow-core doors for the campfire from a house project. Maybe the ad hoc axe throwing competition was the big draw. But I suspect it has something to do with the absolutely perfect snow we found on Hurricane Ridge in Olympic National Park, the twenty-degree weather that kept it there, and the cross-country skier who was trying to pick a fight over our snow shoe tracks ruining his ski tracks. I still think we could have taken him.

In February Jac and I took a couple of days out of her winter break week, as we are getting into the habit of doing, and got in some camping on Orcas Island again in the San Juans. It was an unusually cold trip, especially for being right on the salt water. Evenings were in the twenties and a lot of lakes and streams frozen awful thick. I was proud of her. Over our three day stay we got in almost twenty miles of trail hiking. When we walked up to the highest point in the San Juan's (Mt. Constitution - 1550'), it was remarkable: clear as a bell and the views of WA and BC were unsurpassed.

In early summer I got an opportunity to jump in on a 2+ day 30-mile Olympic Nat'l Park. It was an east to west through trip from the Doeswallips to the Quilcene (I know, I know, more funny names). The weather was classic Washington summer in a rain forest: spots of sun, rain, and for the most part cool. The fifteen mile start day was a pretty good stretch. I used a bivy bag for the first time and found out that I don't like sleeping at eye level with field mice or the other things that go bump in the night. And I won't go into the claustrophobic dreams of being buried alive in a nylon coffin full of condensation. Needless to say, I found out I'm more of a tent guy.

Nancy granted me a week in August to fulfill a 40th birthday backpacking dream to revisit the northwest corner of Glacier Park. I've been aching to retrace some routes from the 1980's and scratch a few more peaks off my list. As with most plans that are years in the making, often times they are overshadowed by illusions that mask reality. I found out that I bruise as easy as week old fruit, wounds don't clot as quickly as they use to, 65 pounds should be in the bed of my pickup and not in a pack on my back, and canoeing looks better in the photos than it feels when the wind kicks up. The trail miles brought back some good memories and felt kind underfoot, but the bushwhacks and obscure routes up rotten rock couloirs didn't seem as fun as I remembered. Maybe it's an age thing, but in the end I finally shrugged and acknowledged there are some things I'm better without. Like leaving home the baggage next time. And investing in newer, lightweight gear. The week left me a changed man. But the summer was not over. Not quite.

In August the 2nd annual father/kid backpack trip was near the shadow of Mt Rainier this year and went off without a hitch. Its fun watching the kids grow and experiencing a little of what some of my backpacking circle of friends caught onto a little later in life. Our little sea of dome tents, snap lights, and no-bake brownies made for good times for the kids. Maybe some day they will be packing the Cheetos and ramen for us.

At the end of September my youngest sister flew in from Utah for a brother/sister bonding backpacking trip. Although we have both been active in the outdoors for years, we had never been on a trip together. The local was the Golden lakes Loop on the east side of the mountains for four days and 25-35 miles. Sky was clear and blue, day temps in the 70's and touching freezing at night; the larch were in full turn, giving us seas of gold everywhere. At the end of the second day we spotted a forest first just beginning near our intended camp, and at the mouth of the valley we must eventually hike out. After weighing options we decided to err to the safe side and cut the trip short. The long out got longer when my route finding skills faltered (six miles worth), and it was well into the night we got to the car. The ridges glowing with a wall of fire behind us, which may us pleased with the decision but exhausted. It was a marathon day (literally), and when I crunched the numbers, accounting for the late start the first day, we had covered over 30 miles in just over 36 hours, with 8500' of gain and loss. So I guess some of those TV adventure shoes are possible. Haven't quite decided if that was a personal best or personal worst yet, but it's amazing what the body can do when you are afraid of being burned alive.

On the heels of this death march, the annual fall hike was scheduled for only one week later. This year it was famed Sahale Arm off of Cascade Pass in North Cascades Nat'l Park. This place is known for bad weather all year long, and has some of the most rugged, saw-toothed mountains I have ever seen. Even in a time of global warming, we could see a dozen glaciers with a turn of the head, clinging in the cold mountain air. More of a climb than a long thru or loop hike; Sahale was a mile vertical in six. Campsites were circles of rock on a barren and exposed moraine at the foot of a glacier; incredible views but also the full wrath of Mother Nature at 7,500'. We got a good dose of both before the end of the trip. The trek in and out was in terrible low-visibility freezing rain, wind, and temps dropping in the teens at night. But a one-day window magically appeared, and as the crampons bit into the icy snow it was shirt sleeve weather for several hours on the shoulder of Sahale and other glacial environs. Wonderful views, classic glacier travel, good company. One of the best fall hikes in memory.

Now it's time to grab a pencil and pull out the calendar for next year.