

Greetings to All

This year's family photo was taken Sea World in San Diego, which I dubbed the *REAL* Happiest Place on Earth during a prior visit when I discovered that (thanks to Anheuser Busch ownership) a thirsty person could get three free full beers under the guise of 'tasters.' As if Bud Light required tasting. I returned this year on a beautiful sunny California November day to fully take advantage of this flawed beverage dispensing system, only to find the liberal free beer policy had been abandoned. Now it's just another overpriced theme park that smells like dead fish and penguin waste. But, as usual, I digress.

Saying it's been busy year always seems like cheap letter filler. It didn't seem any busier than usual. Nothing really seemed to stand out. But since it's December and I'm looking more forward than back, I generally need to pull the dog-eared family calendar off the kitchen wall for a refresher. Wow, it's been a busy year.

Safeco was acquired by Liberty Mutual around my last seasonal update, so I guess you can call the transition pretty much complete although it most likely will be one of those perpetually on-going things. In the end, I got a new email, higher health care premiums, and a continuing paycheck. So I'm putting it in the win column. And judging how IT at Liberty (I'm still a quality assurance analyst) is like stepping back in time fifteen years, there is not only a lot to do but also a lot of places to hide. Nancy's transition, however, didn't go quite as smooth. Her role in premium audit was eliminated in the merge of management and systems, and she found herself completely stepping out of that field and is now managing a state filings department. Since I know that most of you started to yawn at the beginning of this paragraph when the word 'insurance' was mentioned, I'll just leave the detail of her job to your imagination. In the end it's a good fit with responsibility growth and a very viable career path, so another overall win.

As for the rest of the family, Jaclyn and Mitchell are doing just fine. When they aren't kicking, fighting, yelling, tattling, and claiming persecution from the other (like every good brother and sister does during these growing years). They are generally pretty good kids. Jac is still in advanced placement classes, and has moved on to middle school and the seventh grade where they actually get take home laptops. And when I get her butt unglued from in front of the TV to take out the trash, a smile almost crosses my face. Almost. She still has the metal grin going with a year left on the braces still, but they give her a pretty good game face for soccer as there is pretty much perpetual practice twice a week and the activity sucks up around 35 weekends a year with games. Somehow she must have gotten the sports gene. Still an avid reader and a little too much into that Twilight stuff than I'd like, but she was able to balance out by getting student of the quarter in woodshop. So I can't complain too much.

Mitch, on the other hand, is cleaning up his school reputation from last year as being somewhat 'difficult' with teachers. He loves his classes and is an enthusiastic reader as well, and I've hardly had to go down to see the principal at all this fall. Teeth are falling out and coming in just far enough apart to maintain that wonderful second grade

goofy look, and he continues to surprise me with his spelling and math homework. Add in the fact he loves Legos (which I'm constantly pulling out of the bottom of my feet) and really big campfires, and I think we've got enough of a bond to at least keep him from being a first time offender for at least couple more years.

On those precious few weeks without soccer, we did find ourselves on the move. In January we spent some time up at the grandparents in Chewelah. The kids love playing in the snow, and I've found it's one of the few places I can shoot my Curio & Relic firearms from the front porch without have anyone call the police. I also finally had to break down and buy a gun safe. It's kind of like having a standing coffin out in the garage, but I sleep better at night and have gotten use to it. We also did the Lake Quinalt Bike Ride for Cancer again this spring. There's nothing like a comfortable 30 mile fun ride through the Olympic rain forest, including a couple of donut stops. And it didn't even rain. This summer we made it to the Chewelah Chataqua, first time in a couple of years. I'm always amazed at the people I run across from high school there that I haven't seen for a decade or two. It was kind of a preamble to my 25th high school class reunion in early August. This was an in-between one that I initially got the ball rolling on about a year ago and then pretty much dropped. But someone else picked it up, and it was nice seeing faces again. Small towns are notorious for some things never changing, and we had our share of that. And the icing on the cake was it fell on Nancy's birthday. Of course, Jac and Mitch got to spend a couple hot August weeks with my parents on the east side of the state this year. Mitch got in a lot of swimming and Jac a lot of walking with my mom. I'm glad the kids were able to experience something outside of the great suburbia of Renton and suck of as much sun as they could. But the big trip this year was packing up the family and visiting to my old stomping grounds of Glacier Park. We took a week and did a combination of tent camping in the northwest corner and then cabins on the east side where I worked as a front desk clerk back in the mid 1980's. Of course, cabins that cost \$21 a night then are now \$83 and haven't changed a bit. It would be nice if they at least threw on a new coat of paint every twenty years. We hit three days of biblical rain at Bowman Lake, and the rest was 85 degrees and sun at Swiftcurrent. I took along a canoe this trip, so besides hiking, big warm camp fires, and playing games at the great fireplace in the historic lodge at Many Glacier, we also got in a good amount of paddling (some of it very memorable when a mountain squall blew down on us miles from shore). Spring flowers were hanging on late, and the bears were just starting to come down to the low country for berries. It was another great national park trip, with hopefully many more to come.

Ah. I think that's enough for one year. For those of you who complain my holiday letters are two long, then I would advise you not to read the supplement second page.

Happy Holidays and a Merry Christmas from the Wing Family.

Dave, Nancy, Jaclyn, and Mitchell

2009

Mountain Man Year in Review

An absolutely banner year. One of those you look back on and wonder how it all came together.

Snow Camp XIV got things going on the right foot. This was a new area for us: Mt Hood. Severe flooding has closed down states main N/S interstate for almost a week; some of the group almost didn't make it. Lodging was at historic Timberline Lodge (of the movie 'The Shining' fame), where the ordinary became extraordinary. With recent storms we cut fresh snowshoe tracks in some incredible virgin meadows of harsh white against a cerulean sky. Low temps and sun that gave no warmth. Perfect. And the heated pool and hot tub surrounded by snowdrifts at the lodge wasn't too bad either.

Jac and I got in our usual camping trip to the San Juan Islands in February. We caught a nice little weather window, and even got in some snow hiking miles. Cassie joined us for this trip, and ran the trails until she could hardly walk. And then she'd snore like a drunken sailor next to the evening fire. River otters were cracking thru the frozen lakes, and the weather was cold but peaceful. I also got Jac out for a clamming tide a month later, and we even took in a day of Washington's very brief shrimp season in the Hood Canal in May. Pull those little suckers up from 200 feet and watching their eyes pop can be a little unsettling if you aren't expecting it.

May found a nice little day trip up to Camp Muir, 10,000' up the shoulder of Mt Rainier. A pre-dawn start gave us good snow under headlamps, with an incredible clear sky and endless views. The best part was on descent, watching literally hundreds of climbers and day hikers alike trudge upward in the unrelenting 85 degree sun, sinking to their knees in the liquefied snow. Ah, the sadistic joy found in the misery of other that only experience can bring.

July 4th was spent in the Enchantments. This is an incredible beautiful and popular backpacking destination, with the most restrictive permit system in the northwest to keep it from being loved to death. We did a walk up permit, got the last draw for the weekend by chance. I was in there area several years ago in late fall. Summer was still early with heavy snows this time. The mountain goats where shedding thick winter coats, while fresh spring kids kept within easy reach while licking lichen. Much of the trail was still snow covered up high, and we made the most of the three day forty mile trip with the usual 10,000 ft of cumulative gain. Weather, again, unusually perfect. Every picture a postcard.

Jac wasn't available for the big kid hike this year, so I took Mitchell. Just a couple of nights up at Sheep Lake around Chinook Pass during mid summer. The mosquitoes made their presence known, but some nice trail hiking and lots of time slinging mud in the warm lake shallows. He's coming along in his tolerance for being outside and

away from video games. Although his bug phobia is becoming legendary. Mention a spider and he turns into a little Tasmanian Devil (the cartoon naturally).

August found Nancy and I back in California to revisit day hiking Mt Whitney with her sister and friends. I had a hiking friend join in the quest as well. With a midnight start, clear sky, big moon, and temps that ended up around in the twenties once the wind kicked in, it was not a trip for the ill prepared. The sun rise was a long time coming, and took away the frostbite and hypothermia for those afflicted. Even melted a snot-sickle or two. Round trip for us ended up somewhere around fourteen hours plus, but not bad for twenty miles and well over a mile of gain topping out at the highest point in the lower 48. Yes, the air does get a little thin around at 14k foot mark.

As a follow up, the fall hike this year was a nice little twenty mile loop so far up in the northeast corner of the state we actually crossed into Idaho and could see the 45th parallel clear-cut of the Canadian boarder. The Salmo Priest has been an area on the list for a long time. Great ridge walks with expansive views. Trekking though dead stands from forest fires of the recent past in the wonderfully hot autumn sun. Even a couple of old historic fire lookouts still standing we were able to explore and enjoy. Although in the end, lack of water became an issue and the daily miles were extended accordingly.

October brought me to the Grand Canyon, to re-do a trip from close to twenty years ago: Rim to Rim to Rim. After close to a year of planning, our group settled on making the 21 mile S to N Kaibab trail trip one day, then take a rest day at the North Rim Lodge, and then the 24 mile N to S Bright Angel back. Basically it boils down to a couple of marathons crossings an inverted mile high plus mountain. The 3am starts under starry skies helped, along with those only doing a single crossing that shuttled the van and gear between trailheads. Temperature went from high 20s to almost 90, making the mixture of night and day hiking critical. The balance was perfect, and company the best. Although dropping down to the Colorado and dragging ourselves six thousand feet up to the north rim (8,200') eleven hours later took it's toll, and in the end I was the only one making the double crossing with the fresh team. But the return was equally good company, and just ten and a half hours later I was rubbing elbows with the four million tourists who visit the park annually. Although most of them smelled a lot better than I did. I hear the next step in the evolution of a Grand Canyon thru hiker is to do both crossings back to back in under 24 hours. Maybe something for my 50th in a few years, pending on what kind of joint cartilage I've got left. At least I can say I didn't burn it all up mowing the lawn.

All in all, not a bad year. But what's? Hmmm..... Maybe the family will be trekking though the geysers at Yellowstone? Possibly a early summer climb up Mt Adams? Who knows, there might even be a nice forty miles around the base of Mt Hood?

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