

*He was an old man who fished alone in a skiff in the Gulf Stream,
and he had gone eighty-four days now without taking a fish.*

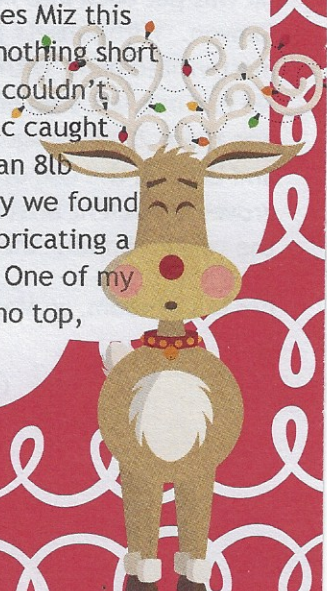
It was said that Hemmingway would spend months working on the opening line of a novel, and after that the work would literally write itself. I thought I would give it a try, since the world ends on 12/21 and I really need to get this in the mail. Guess I should have started eighty-four days ago.

As I sit and pen this annual holiday magnum opus that so many of you love to hate (but read anyway, often times in the bathroom I've been told for ease of recycling), my eye keeps drifting to this weather station LCD console I have on my desk. About a year and a half ago I put a contraption up on the roof, and by some miracle of science it beams waves of information effortlessly providing temperature, humidity, wind, and a dozen different indexes I don't understand. But rainfall is my favorite. I got tired of hearing people complain about how much rain we get in beautiful Renton. Seattle statistically sits at 38 inches a year, but precipitation here can be micro regional and there's no way we could be near that. So as my little geeky device has been capturing data over the last calendar year, I have eagerly watched with anticipation the numbers tick up with the certainty our house is far below that crazy Noah's Ark number. At the time of this writing, we are sitting at 57.38 inches. We will easily break 60 before month's end. In other words, if I stood flatfooted I'd basically drown. So anyone under 5'8" thinking of moving to Western Washington want to reconsider (or learn how to tread water).

This year instead of interpreting (and embellishing) what I think the individual family highlights are and bundling them up in witty little paragraphs, I decided to go right to the source. I pulled the battered 2012 family calendar off the wall and sat down with everyone (of course not at the same time, because for some reason that kind of perfect storm doesn't ever hit our home), and asked them what three things over the course of the year put a smile on their face (for mine check **The Review**).

Nancy: Derby Party - We attended our first Kentucky Derby party this May, which also coincided with Cinco De Mayo. Nancy got to make a big funky Southern Belle hat, I got to wear my kilt, and we both cheered the horses to the finish line in Spanish. It was a buen tiempo, and "I'll Have Another" won by a nose. **Blue Angels** - Jac's high school (Aviation HS) has strong ties to the Blue Angles when they come to our area each summer for SeaFair. Nancy got to attend an up close and personal event at the Museum of Flight at Boeing Field. Very cool. **Work Travel** - Nancy transitioned to a new role at work that is making her travel to popular destinations like Des Moines, IA and Waushaka, WI. What's not to love? She gets her own bed with no snoring, three meals served, and doesn't have to feed the dog. And the cheese is to DIE for in Waushaka.

Jaclyn: Les Misérables - Jac had never see a real professional musical, so I took her to Les Miz this summer (which I saw 15 years ago). With seats in the 8th row slightly stage right, it was nothing short of incredible. An 80 year old lady did her best to sing along with Jean Val Jean, but just couldn't keep up. **Mole Hunting** - Our Shrimp Camp campsite was infested with mole mounds. Jac caught movement in one. My friend (Pete) moved in for the kill with the nearest tool at hand - an 8lb firewood splitting maul. It acted like one of those bunker bombs, as during body recovery we found the mole expired from environmental compression. He was also just the right size for fabricating a beer can cozy. **Scout** - Jac got her permit at the same time as the KFC family campout. One of my friends (Craig) had his vintage International Harvester Scout there (in classic condition: no top,



primer gray, all critical mechanical systems compromised). She drove it up a steep logging road, it stalled, rolled backwards, and she thought her first drive would be her last. I think we all need to occasionally brush death to really appreciate (and preserve) life.

Mitchell: Valley of the Gods - There is an area in SW Utah with an unsigned/unmarked 20 mile jeep dirt road that meanders thru rock formations out of a Roadrunner cartoon. I drove it at 20mph blasting the soundtrack from *Last of the Mohicans* pretending to be searching for Indians. Loved it. **Bug Lakes** - The kid hike was to Deer and Sand lakes in the South Cascades. The bugs were so continuous and horrible that by the end of the weekend our camp looked like a leper colony from all of the overlapping mosquito bites (apparently Mitch remembers it better, or is still hallucinating from the trauma). **Orcas Island** - The annual February trip to Orcas Island was just me and the little man. He acquiesced to do one hike with me, after that we spent the next three days tending a huge campfire and burning stuff. He LOVES campfires. I call him my little four-eyed Pyro-metheus.

The big family outing this year was road trip thru the wilds of Utah (and beyond). After two weeks and 3300 miles, I can honestly say we've experience the extremes of geological diversity as well as family bonding. We began w/ a visit with my sister (Stacie) in Salt Lake City, and although still late June, we found ourselves trying to acclimate to the triple digit heat and single digit humidity. Pretty much the polar opposite of the PNW. Our first stop was a couple of days camping at Arches NP. It was quickly reinforced that the body is actually 60% water and you need all of it, with shade being a rare and precious commodity. Jac and I got in a little hiking, and found anything short of a 5:30 AM start is pretty much a death wish. The desert is a strangely beautiful yet mercilessly unforgiving kind of place. Like the high school prom.

From there we touched Canyonlands NP, Valley of the Gods, Bridges NM and found ourselves in Capitol Reef NP (where I learned that Mormons make delicious pies). I didn't know what those t-shirts that said 'UTAH ROCKS' really meant until passing thru these areas. The highways were full of 9k mountain passes and 18% grades that were nothing short of willed into existence by some pretty stubborn engineers (who for reasons unknown were very committed on linking together **Vast Emptiness and Total Nothing**). I'm sure federal and state dollars were spent well. After that it was petrified wood at Escalante SP, followed by a nice air conditioned hotel room at the entrance to Bryce Canyon NP. It was here I realized the biggest problem the National Park system faces: PEOPLE. It was a crazy concentration of camera-toting city mice in a very small area, the majority of whom overwhelmingly confirmed the value of natural selection (thank you, Darwin). Zion proved even more urbanized, but watching the sun rise from the Angels Landing (an easy 2.5 miles and 1500' in my world, yet proudly emblazoned on gaudy t-shirts for soft-footed tourists who need validation from strangers) is nothing short of inspiring. Even more so when the ranger is yelling at you to climb down because the trail is closed for removal of outhouse contents by helicopter (as if my vacation plans revolve around the Nat'l Park turd extraction schedule). Our campsite backed up to the Virgin River, a 30 ft. wide wimpy shallow stream great for cooling off in the 108F heat. Amazing to think it also carved the entire Zion canyon system with flash floods as massive as they are legendary. I'm more than happy to read about violent geological history and not be a part of it.

All was put back into balance by the lazy kicked-back feeling afforded at the cabins on the North Rim of the Grand Canyon. With sunsets just as spectacular as the south rim but a fraction the tourist, the kids got to see one of the most visited parks without the of the hustle and bustle that I consider anti-nature. As the trip was winding down, we had one last stop on the long trek north: Great Basin NP in Nevada. This was a newly established park when I was there 20 years ago, and development has been subtle, making it more primitive than most. Out of the way and little in the line of amenities, it boasts the clearest night skies in the lower 48, a 13k peak for climbing, groves of ancient bristlecone pines (4k+ years old), and home to the greatest unique limestone cave features in the world. Bonus: the campground is at 10k, and it's free. At last, my kind of place.

I'm out of room, so Merry Xmas to one and all.

Dave, Nancy, Jaclyn, and Mitchell

The Mountain Man Review

The year started off with the 17th Annual Snow Camp, deep in the south Cascades in a cabin behind which rose Mt. Adams. We could snowshoe off the front porch. Could have if there had been snow, that is. We did get in some hiking, trekked thru old lava tubes, and visited a historical national forest guard station (which a few months later burned to the ground). Even threw some rounds downrange from my P64 and CZ82 and Mike's .223 (off a flatbed Ford – nothing like the song though). Didn't seem like enough activity to offset the beer drinking, but HEY, I can't control the weather.

Nancy and I returned to Kauai in April for the first time in 20 years, giving Jac and Mitch their first taste of the Garden Isle (aptly named, given it has one of the wettest places on earth: Mount Wai'ale'ale – 460 inches a year). It was a good opportunity to share a hike with Jac that I did with her mother back in the day: Kalalau beach at the end of the famous Na Pali coast trail (longest continuous stretch of the Hawaiian Islands not developed). Yep, 11 miles one way with a whopping 5300 feet of gain/loss. This time I was more prepared with the correct gear, and trail time was just at five hours (vs. nine hours two decades ago). I'd like to think I'm in better shape now, but in reality I think I'm just better at tolerating the pain. We spent two nights, and got to meet some of the local hippies who live there (illegally) year round. D'metri was a Russian ex-bodying builder surfer vegan from Siberia, who admitted he never slept so well as after eating a feral pygmy goat (descended from Capitan Cook's time) that one of his fellow tribesman had 'harvested' to make a drum skin. Or Jimmy J, a 45 year old freelance graphic designer who hiked out there with his 3rd wife and didn't have the means for ticket back to the mainland. Add to this dinner and a movie line-up that we got to relax on the beach while observing naked hula hoop, naked volleyball, and a half-naked drum circle during a surreal stormy sunset. Jac grew up in a hurry this trip. I was a little turned off that the 'locals' also tend to shower in the waterfall which is the camp's primary source of drinking water; but I packed my filter and had no problem waiting for them to finish while I patiently sat on a rock and observed (with judgment). The trek out we got hit by some heavy rains on the open cliff sections (making for some dicey moments above the crashing ocean), and it was nice to get back to and wash off that volcanic mud (in the timeshare's washing machine, of course). The balance of the week was snorkeling, beaching, chasing the feral cats and chickens, and enjoying the laid back atmosphere of this relatively quiet little island.

May shrimping in the Hood Canal was phenomenal this year. The 'season' is only 4 hrs. per day for 4 days spread over two weeks. Because of unusually high tides from a lunar orbit anomaly, two days calendared back to back. Better yet, they landed on a Friday/Saturday. The icing on the cake: completely calm with no wind, full sun, and low 70s. In other words, absolutely perfect. We pulled in almost full limits each day, and to supplement we harvested some local steamer clams and oysters. Some of the best camp eating I've done in quite a while. Throw in the mole story from the previous page and I'm talking the ultimate surf and turf platter. Yum.

The spring hike this year was one talked about for quite a while: Northshore Trail on Lake Chelan in the rugged North Cascades. Chelan is the 3rd deepest lake in the US at 1600' (behind Crater and Tahoe), the largest inland fjord (60 miles long and only a couple wide), and has the small town of Stehekin at its northern tip (very isolated – access is by water only – hippie haven and the two dozen autos up there all have tabs expired for at least ten years). The only way to and from the trailhead was by water taxi, which takes a couple of hours and more than a couple of dollars. For a long weekend the miles were short (by our standards) and trail was easy at under 25 miles.

But the views and camps were fantastic. Not to mention spring was late, giving miles of wildflowers still in bloom. Although logistically tough to get to, it is a great experience for a beginner (and someday the kids).

We finally had to pay our dues at the Lake Quinault Cancer Bike Ride. Set in late June in the middle of a rainforest, I've been spoiled over the years by never experiencing bad weather. This year it was 30 miles of continuous driving rain and muddy washouts, with only the fear of hypothermia to keep you going as temperatures stays in the 40s. Only one person didn't finish (Joe), from a chain brake and he was forced to hitch a ride. Although given the overall misery level of the ride, we should have had that chain more closely examined. It did however make the post ride beer taste that much better (once my hands stopped shaking enough to hold one).

The annual Labor Day Wine Fest was back in the Tri-Cities this year. I love finishing out the summer on the East side of the state. The weather is always sunny and dry. This year there was a lot of horseshoe throwing and lake lounging by the waterside, in addition to walking amongst the vineyards with a glass of wine. It also gave Jac some long driving hours behind the wheel. The state only requires 50 hours for a driver's license. MY minimum is 500 hours. Mainly because I feel experience is important, and I wouldn't mind delaying adding her to our auto insurance.

The fall hike this year was 30+ miles in the Siete Diablos region of Cañón de Infiernos (Hells Canyon is the deepest canyon in the US at 6,000' plus) in Central Idaho along the Oregon border. All of the peaks had some kind of satanic name, like Devil's Throne, Imp, She-Devil. Along with lots of local tags like Dry Diggins, Hobbs Cow Camp, and Potato Hill. All had wonderfully open and craggy profiles, great country for the mountain boy in all of us. A large ratio of the miles were over 7k, making the views expansive and exposed and yielding many long enjoyable stretches (when not obscured from the smoke of the half dozen forest fires raging in the vicinity that could cross the ridge at any moment and cremate us). This is some dry country; nothing rots here. It just desiccates and turns to dust in the wind. We found a vintage steel Coca Cola can at an old horse camp site; I packed it out and was able to date it by label and type (with the use of modern technology and soda can trivia nerd websites) to 1965. I wished I still looked that good after rolling in pine needles for 45 years (given I've spent a fair share of my time in the same conditions). My personal experience for this trip was marred by my own hubris. The boots I wore (newer) had a fatal heel rub that I could not work around, and by the third day I could feel the silver dollar blisters with every step (and every beat of the heart thru the endless nights of sweat-lodge malaria like misery). Fortunately the steady flow of tears from the blinding pain ran down my cheeks to my mouth, and I was able to partially quench my constant and insatiable thirst in this high alpine desert. In the end, there was nothing to do but reach down deep into the well of the soul and chant my death hymn in iambic pentameter all the way to the trailhead. Which, once achieved, began the mental challenge of waiting for skin to slowly grow back with that stringy orange textured quality only found in Pacific Northwest Madronna bark. Other than that, it was an OUTSTANDING trip.

And what about next year? Spring Hike where we camp in an 8-man teepee? A week long cruise to Alaska? Hiking and climbing Glacier National Park? The Great American Beer Festival in the Mile High City? Only time will tell..... but if you dream it, it will happen (non-refundable deposits help too).

DAVE