

2014

*Happy families are all alike;
every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.*

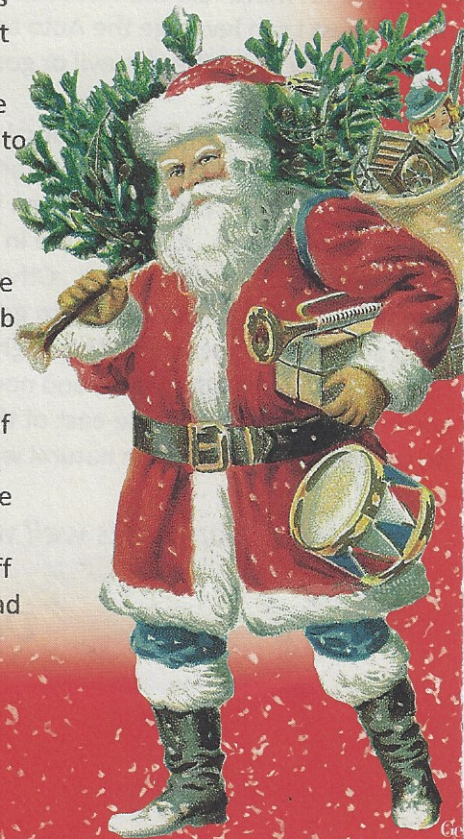
When Tolstoy opened what was to be his tragic thousand-page novel *Anna Karenina* with that line, they were the first words in a tale of family, religion, and morality that would take him years to complete. I had a similar experience this summer, when I found myself muttering the very same sentence. I was gazing across the indifferent faces seated with me in the truck, while slowing easing out of the driveway with literally a half ton of camping gear behind and a couple of weeks of adventure in front. Three thousand plus miles is LOT of family time, and we Wings are all about doing it in our own way (for better for worse).

This route took us straight into the heart of darkness (also known as Nevada - where ALL of the byways should be signed The Loneliest Road in America), across the deserts of Death Valley, along the spine of the Sierra Nevada, thru California's north shore fog, and up the Oregon coast. With countless mountain passes we eventually got use to the smell of burning brakes and the whine of downshifting. Good thing I switched to full synthetic oil for this trip.

Great Basin NP was our first stop. We had a stunning forested campsite at 10k, took walks thru ancient bristlecone pine forests (oldest trees in the world @ 3-4k years), toured limestone caves, and counted double digit satellites in the clearest night sky I have ever witnessed. Jac even got to join me on an alpine start and climbed her first 13k peak (Mt Wheeler). After a stop at very scary run down clown-themed motel (next to an old mining cemetery of course), we toured the world's largest junk car forest (yes, the hills do have eyes) and then paid homage to an orphaned Bob's Big Boy statue (500 miles from the nearest BBB restaurant - so sad). Death Valley was raw desert beauty, incredibly expansive, and HOT. It was 125F for most of our stay with nights in the high 90s. Fortunately our lodging inside of the park had a swimming pool, which we used often. And with the wind I felt like a piece of jerky.

Sequoia NP was filled with massive towering matriarchal sequoias (as expected). While walking thru several meadows ringed by the largest trees in the world (in volume), I was constantly reminded that the national parks are Grade-A moron magnets. And it would appear the most powerful in the world. From the noise, crowds, and the inability to read simple signs, these folks were in great supply. Then Yosemite really turned it up a notch. The beauty of El Capitan, Half Dome, the Tioga highway, and Tuolumne meadows was drown in a flood of city mice rushing in ranks of such I have never seen. But we did get a taste of those great granite faces and Jac and even knocked out a little climb up to North Dome for some more secluded high Sierra views.

We made up for this at Lassen Volcanic National Park. It had a little of everything - hiking trails, mountains to climb, and the only thermals outside of Yellowstone (although the 1500 acre 'blast zone' was a little pale compared to the 153,000 acre zone from our humble national monument of Mt St Helens). Lake Manzanita had some cool cabins off the lake with inspiring sunsets (from the summer forest fires). I just had



to take the family a little out of the way to hit the Emigrant Museum at Truckee pass. Of course it was all about the Donner Party and their fateful winter there in 1846, but I guess cannibalism still isn't politically correct.

Then I pointed the Dodge to the coast and made for the Redwoods. Not before taking in the oldest Chinese temple (1848) in the US and checking out the Bigfoot Museum (with spotting site maps for sale). The CA coast felt like home – 60s and foggy. A nice change from all of the 100+ weather we had been chasing.

Now THESE are the tallest trees in the world, and the groves in the morning mist were a little more than just awe inspiring. Throw in a WWII radar station disguised as a farm house and a couple of cheesy 20 ton talking steel sculptures of Paul Bunyan and Babe the Blue Ox (yep, real moron magnets), and you have a road trip worthy of Clark Griswold. All I needed was fake wood siding on the Dodge and a dog leash dragging from the bumper. We had to skip our last planned stop at Oregon Caves and their historic 1930s Chateau because of a scheduling faux pas at home, but I did get new tires in Oregon and thus succeeded in helping the economy of every state we visited.

Jaclyn is in her senior year. Where did my 30's and 40's go?? Her schedule is tighter than most of the professionals I work with. This fall has been all about college applications and early admission. She did some campus visits over the summer including a week-long 'camp' at Purdue. Needless to say, she drank the Kool Aide and has been wearing Boilermaker logos the last couple of months. We just found out this week she got accepted, and with it the reality of coming up with \$250,000 over the next four years. I remember writing tuition checks for \$1,600 per year back in the day, so I must be very very very old or things are really really really screwed up (I tell myself a little of each). She also got accepted to Portland, Montana, Rose-Hulman, and good old EWU (alma mater), so Nancy's retirement funds might be safe yet. Pile on top of that AP classes, intern work, the upcoming robotics season (she's the lead this year), the nerd pack she spends any spare time with, and this six foot five guy who keeps hanging around the house like some kind of teen sloth that I'm told is her boyfriend. Never a dull moment.

Mitch is coming into his own as well. Couple more inches and he'll be eye to eye with me. Add to that his Barry White voice and some facial fuzz, and the carefree days of childhood are pretty much gone. At least he will still join me for some camping and an occasional gun show. Started middle school this year, and he may spend more than his allotted time there if he doesn't figure out how that homework thing works. I'm finding out that those *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* books are lot more fact than fiction. He's still a Boy Scout and there is always some kind of badge requirement to sign off. At least I can leverage the Auto and Home Repair ones to get him into the garage. How he loves that computer and all technology. Whether for evil or good only time will tell (and most likely a judge and jury will be involved as well).

Nancy and I are still at Liberty Mutual. Last spring I was asked to end my seven year streak of telecommuting and take a desk at the office. I guess when I transition to my 'new' role last year, they have a policy that you work an office job in an office. Which is pure irony, given the teams I support are in India or New Hampshire so I interact remotely anyway and sit all by myself. It has put me in a mood for a change in location, both professionally and personally. Nancy is still wearing a business analyst hat. Other than some wonderful work trips to Ohio in the middle of winter it seems to be suiting her well. She is looking to get back towards something in the premium audit space that will allow her to work from any physical location. This might dovetail well with our eventual plan to get moved over to the Spokane area. We have talked about it for years, and now with one kid leaving the nest its time to start taking steps. At this writing we are currently closing on a house east of the Spokane Valley, and with a little luck, Mitch can attend high school somewhere he can get his vitamin D the natural way – from the sun.

Hope all is well with you and yours. Merry Christmas from the Wings

Dave, Nancy, Jaclyn, Mitchell

The Mountain Man Review

This year started out with New Years at a yurt at Cape Disappointment State Park. It's located at near the mouth of the mighty Columbia River on the WA side, and where Lewis and Clark wintered during their epic exploration of the newly acquired Louisiana Purchase. It's also called the Graveyard of the Pacific because the shifting sand bars and horrific storms claimed many a ship back in the day. But when you rent a spacious yurt with a heater and electricity, it can be a pretty good time. Enjoyed the winter rains, the wild sunsets, not one but two lighthouses, all of the history, and messing around with the raccoons at night with a laser pointer. And beer. Something for the kid in all of us.

The 19th Annual Snow Camp was local this year (at least for me) and we sought our snow up at Snoqualmie Pass. What we got was a lot of sideways rain, mushy slush, temps in the 40s, and every snow park trailhead down to the bare pavement. Turn that up a click by 'camping' in a travel trailer in a trailer park with full time guests, and watching a DVD of *D'Jango Unchained* because we couldn't get the cable to work. But the trifecta was finding a tavern in walking distance playing the Seahawk game with free chili and raffle tickets for Pabts Blue Ribbon tee-shirts. Yep. Sometimes you get B-slapped by Mother Nature and have to take the good with the bad.

Although Mitch is not as big of a camper as he used to be, he joined me and Cassie out at Orcas Island for the traditional February four day trip. We cut it a little short because of weather, but we got in some great hiking miles as usual and even donated a couple of wooden benches I made to the local CCC era picnic shelter. It will be nice to see if they are still there next year.

Hiking was pretty light this year for some reason. Not that I'm getting old, just more and more conflicts with so many overlapping schedules and activities. Jac joined me for one final time on a kid hike this year. You have heard me speak of the Ozette triangle on the northern Olympic Coast over the years. A rugged and beautiful place, but logistically tough to reach from just about anywhere. But it has too much to offer in one place to pass up. You trek thru miles of rolling meadow; then rocky low tidal pool; across gold sand beaches. Even some native American petroglyphs of whales and masted sailing ships carved into rocks above the waterline. A lot to take in. And the weather even cooperated.

The fall hike found us late September on Copper Ridge in the North Cascades NP. This is a truly vast, craggy, and massive place (both in elevation and miles). Not that we saw more than a hundred feet in any direction on the hike it due to the angry clouds, rain, and heavy fog. Wet cold is the worst cold in the world. I was in my sleeping bag in midafternoon cursing at the No Fires Allowed signs. But like any mountain adventure, sometimes you must pay your dues first. An early start in fog the next day had us rolling up to the still manned fire lookout right as the rangers were locking it down for the season. We spent hours up there, watching the mists melt away and incredible 360 views unfold. It was appreciated by all, and the vistas burned in my mind will outlast any photo album. Well, unless I get some brain disease, which is why I still make albums. The North Cascades is a fickle place, the only thing bigger than what it gives it what it will take from the unprepared. Just ask the hikers we met who were almost swept away during a river crossing after four days of heavy rain.....

Keep hiking, my friends...

~ DW ~