



If you do not change direction, you may end up where you are heading.
- Lao Tzu

There are so many quotes about change and how it is good for you it is almost nauseating. It can be expressed in endless ways: an opportunity, growth, the path not taken, the only constant, live free or die (thank you, New Hampshire).

My experience with big change usually comes from those 'going in a new direction' announcements at work when there is a senior leadership turnover and it time to 'embrace' something new (which is almost always something old recycled from the just distant enough past). But in the personal space, I really do believe change is good. If that premise holds true, then the Wings have had a great year because we are going all kinds of new directions.

Mitchel's direction is up. Actually, we no longer have a Mitchell. We now have Mitch. He's thirteen, just north of five foot eight with no signs of stopping, with a size thirteen shoe and a voice like Barry White. I'm not sure where he came from. The only reason I can still tell he is my son is that feeding the dog and taking out the trash simply cannot be saved in his short or long term memory. Mitch has been pretty active in scouting and on the Trail to Eagle as they call it. Although he sometimes considers it the Highway to Hell.

Currently he is the Senior Patrol Leader, and he is finding out it's more than just leading the Pledge of Allegiance at the weekly meetings. He attended a scout leadership camp last summer, in addition to week at Camp Merriweather on the Oregon Coast. I took time off from work and went as a parent volunteer. When you have almost twenty scouts sleeping on platform tents for seven days in the forest, the more supervision the better. I had never been to a scout camp before and learned a lot about ceremonies, singing, merit badges, and why those kids smell so bad when they get home (regardless that showers are free). Mitch also spent a week at a kid's computer camp at the UW because of his programming interest. At the end of which he concluded 'it takes an awful lot of work to accomplish very little.' Money well spent in my eyes. He took acting classes at a local children's theater, and has been in a couple of middle school plays. Finally a Wing without the dominant shy gene.

Jaclyn's direction is as far away from home as possible, but close enough for us to send money. I can only confirm her room has been vacant since last summer and the laundry detergent seems to last longer. Her senior year was full of robotics, both in high school and out. She built four units for the Makers Fair in the Bay Area last spring, and used them to educated kids on basics robotic principals while providing some hands on operation (i.e. crash

them into each other). The RAHS SkunkWorks Robotic team did very well in competitions and went to nationals (again) in St. Louis in the spring. Her captain/leadership role attributes helped her to hone the networking and presentation skills that were needed for college applications and scholarships. She applied to ten schools, was accepted by all, and in the end decided on Montana State in Bozeman (because a quarter million of a dollars for Purdue seemed a little excessive for an undergraduate degree – or maybe I'm just being selfish). We are very proud of her. Last I heard she was wrapping up her first semester somewhere just south of a 4.0, pledged AOPi and became their treasurer, works part time during the week, and apparently has a new boyfriend. I think that is more than I did my first two years at college and first three years a Liberty combined, so either she has figured out how to clone herself or is more organized than most of the adults I interact with daily.

Nancy's direction is any path that gets her out of the house. While checking off her 10th year Liberty Mutual, she has also lead for the last several of those company sponsored volunteer events at places like the local food bank and veterans home. At the same time she has been very active in the PTA of two school and the calendar filled quickly. When Jac graduated her organization skills were channeled into Mitch's Boy Scout troop, becoming much more involved than just sewing on patches. She did sneak off to California for her annual Palm Springs outing. Even made another venture down south for a 40th high school class reunion. Currently mapping out the big Rhode Island family reunion next summer is pulling down some bandwidth. Amazing how busy hands have made the year fly by. But in the end, she keeps talking about needing the sunshine and the change of scenery (spoiler alert).

As for Dave, my compass needle tends to spin a little more than it should, but the prominent direction is East. As in East of the Cascades and out of the soggy part of the PNW. Nancy and I made decision a while back to move in three years and chase the sun to Spokane, and time is up. With Jac in college, Mitch finishing up the eighth grade (fingers crossed), and the upcoming spring housing market looking good, all of the pieces are falling into place. In anticipation we have been looking for a house in Spokane more on than off for quite a while. Last summer Nancy worked from the Liberty Lake office and did some in depth recon. She came across an area in the valley with a house that had a floor plan she liked and the location was a good fit. I didn't ever see myself in a ranch home with a basement on a shy half acre, but the garage is enormous and will be put to good use. After a terrible experience with a real estate agent (I'm sure there are good ones out there) we closed late December of last year. The ironic part is we signed papers exactly 20 years to the day that we closed on our current home in Renton. With house in hand and a year ahead of our move plan, it has been leased by what I told our new neighbor was a 'placeholder family' (and not to get attached). We will start moving stuff over around May when it becomes vacant, put our home on the market, and be ready to move when Mitch gets out of school in June. Our jobs with Liberty Mutual are with distributed teams across many time zones, and very portable to the office in Liberty Lake (only four miles from our new home) if telecommuting isn't an option. The nice part about a long exit strategy is the ability to sort through twenty years of accumulation at your leisure. I'm continually amazed at what I can get rid of on eBay and Craigslist, and I've gotten pretty good at topping off my weekly garbage can (and the neighbors). I've found the recycle bin is also a great place to 'de-clutter.'

My next holiday letter will come from sunny Greenacres, WA, and is sure to hold many unique and witty happenstances and observations on our relocation. Then I can resume our famous Clark Griswold road trips across Americana, each a tale of adventure and exploration. Until then, Merry Christmas to you and yours and best wishes for the holiday season.

The Wings -- Dave, Nancy, Jac, & Mitch

The Mountain Man Review

Years ago I called out Al Gore for being a wanker with all of his global climate change tripe. Yes, he is still a wanker (if not more so), but I will grant last year was a warm one in the Pacific Northwest.

For Snow Camp XX (yes, that 20 years for you non Romans) we returned to a great locale of a decade ago - Mt St Helens. What a difference. At last visit there was a half dozen feet of snow, temps in the 20s, and too many snowmobiles to count. Skies were a deep azure and snowshoeing epic. This year the snow park was dry bare pavement, temps pushed the low 70' s, and we hiked a considerable distance up the side of the snow free St Helens only to spot climbers making successful early January summits in short sleeves. It felt (and looked) like late summer. No snow to be had so we got in some good boot miles, then played vintage lawn darts while washing down bacon infused burgers with PNW craft beer in the scariest RV Park the hamlet of Cougar WA had to offer. At least we were able to keep it real.

My annual Orcas Island February trip was equally marred with good weather. Over the last dozen years I' ve done this four day outing with either Jaclyn or Mitchell (or both), tent camping at the primitive sites on Mountain Lake at Moran SP. We would build big fires and take the weather as it was dealt. This year was so mild and warm, I literally roll into a full campsite after catching the earliest AM ferry of the morning (an hour plus ride). In all prior years we might at best see one or two other hardy campers, but never a couple dozen (with trendy yoga mats and expensive mountain bikes and stacks of pallets for firewood). Given limited camping options, and our potential company, we did a couple of short hikes and took the evening ferry home. We slept in the tent office and cooked our camp food over the backyard fire pit. To paraphrase Merriweather Lewis, my curiosity of the San Juans has been satisfied. Time to make some good memories elsewhere.

For the spring hike, with the snowpack so dismally low, we decided to bite off a big one: The Enchantments. It' s almost impossible to pull a permit in the summer, with the season starting mid June. So Memorial Day weekend we took a shot at it. Walking down trail that should still be under a couple feet of snow this time of the season was more than a little surreal. So was our ambition of knocking out ten plus miles with 5K of gain. Stopping short at Snow Lake for a night we made an early start for Vivian in the lower Enchantment basin the next morning (our planned based camp for scrambling). A half mile out we hit snow. A LOT of snow. Nature wasn' t going to give up this crown gem this early in the season. We could have stamped out a platform in the wind and rain and hunkered down, but the mountain goats would not permit it. They were mangy, starting to shed winter fur, and salt deprived. When you look at those sharp horns and hungry eyes

on a 200lb walking carpet that is unafraid and getting way too close comfort (at groin level as well), it can get a little unsettling. At the same time all our sweat soaked gear would be at risk; there would be no peace (or sleep), so back down to Snow it was.

With the Big Kid Hike this year we burned out some miles on the PCT out of Snoqualmie Pass, spending a couple of nights at Ridge and Gravel Lakes. The trail had a lot of day hikers who come to see the views from the Kendall Katwalk, which is a couple hundred foot length of the main trail that was blasted out of some 70 degree pitched granite. To be honest, it's not worth the ten miles round and the elevation gain, but I guess pretty cool for city mice coming from the concrete jungle. It was also clear the lakes we camped at were too close to population, as the amount of tattoos, cigarette smoking, and yoga pants we saw seemed better suited for a shopping mall and/or prison. Also quite a few people were in jeans with big puffy flannel sleeping bags, the ones you see at sleepovers. This made the contrast of the occasional PCT thru hikers that much more vivid. Those scruffy trail rats would basically cut through your site, trip on your tent lines, and round out their camp etiquette with a full commando whore bath (complete with repurposed bandana) along the lake shore in full view of all ages. Good thing this was the Big Kid hike. Weather was stellar and night sky awesome, but those full moons and waning gibbous left a little to be desired.

The fall hike this year we returned to our roots and went in search of Larch (that wonderful conifer that sheds its needles every fall in brilliant golden displays). The Alpine Lakes area at the end of Icicle Creek road was our strike zone. The multi day loop had us target nights at Lake Margaret (heavy forest and damp), Upper Florence (open, exposed, and nothing flat), and Lake Edna (howling wind so loud you couldn't talk). It appears the hottest and driest summer and fall on record decided to take a break during our trip and threw us a real mixed bag. Evenings cold, some clear skies, but a lot of wind, rain, and even sleet. Hiking hours were normally dry, but camp hours we were driven into the tents early and often, more so than any trip I can remember (and some say I have a good memory). With the reasonable miles and early turn-ins, 10-12 hours is a long time to be inside a thin nylon wind battered bubble every day. We started getting stiff, not from the hiking but sleeping pad bed sores. Someone even attempted to raise a mutiny and cut the trip short. I never thought I would see that day when I was in the company of such rebellious naysayers. But I was able to scout an idyllic sunny meadow (and very level) on the lee side of a moraine the final night, so we got in a good scramble for some views and stayed until the rum ran out. Then wrapped up the evening with an illegal fire as it snowed on us. And the larch? Worth every step, every drop of rain, and every wisp of wind. Stay gold, Pony Boy. Stay Gold.

What will next year bring? You'll know in 365 days. Until then, keep hiking my friends.