

Ah, the holiday season. The small one is getting less small, my hair is getting thinner, Nancy is dreaming of tapping that 401K, and the Mariners choke in the playoffs. Another banner year in the Wing household.

As usual, I'll try my best to keep only to the more interesting tales of the past year. Like the fact we are slumlords now. Well, if you call a slumlord someone who buys a brand new house and signs tenants into it four days after the loan closes. Most people would just call it plain stupid. And I would too, but the math worked out and it fit into the master plan of taking steps to get back to Spokane (where our real estate empire resides). It's not a bad little house, the smallest one in a nice new development, and we were able to leverage the differences in economies between the two sides of the state. Now we just bask in the tax advantages while secretly dreading a call from the management company relaying how the police were complaining about sweating up a storm in the haz-mat suits when they raided our tenant's meth lab.

We didn't get a chance to sweat much this summer; it was fast and fleeting as normal. It got dry enough for the moss to die back some and we got in a little camping east of the mountains. Jac (as I call Jaclyn – she doesn't seem to mind except when I use my bad French accent) is starting to love the outdoors. It was a memory in the making: she was playing out in an open meadow along a clear blue stream framed by mountains, her tie-dyed hippie dress ruffled in the soft summer wind while picking flowers. I had to pause and brush back a tear; otherwise I couldn't see the big pile of downed timber I was in the middle of chainsawing up for firewood, or throw the rounds into the back of the '74 Dodge, or look for that beer I had just opened (always check the tailgate first). I guess all that multi-tasking at work is finally paying off.

Oh yes, work. I'm still with Safeco as a quality assurance analyst (if you have to ask you don't want to know). It's been pretty rough for the company as of late, but there's some light at the end of the tunnel. Nancy has continued with Royal/Sun Alliance doing premium audit. She's still traveling quite a bit, but that should be slowing down soon. Well, at least for sure by May, when she'll be taking a couple of months off. It won't be for something as exciting as my European backpacking trip coming up fall of 2002, but childbirth as it's own merits. Yep, it looks like when you give up on trying to have kids they come your way. We've been pretty tight lipped with all of the past history and difficulties, but it looks like Jac will have a baby brother to torment come spring. I'm thinking of doing the room with a planetarium-like ceiling with automotive electrical schematics on the walls, but Nancy thinks it might be a little too 'busy.' We'll see.

Speaking of busy, we did a trip back east in July to the bustling state of Rhode Island to visit relatives on Nancy's side of the family tree. Other than the fact the back roads are dark and scary mazes that swallow up the unsuspecting, and if you sneeze while driving you might end up three states away, it was a good time had by all. I even got to stain the steepest set of deck stairs I've ever had the privilege from which to dangle. The sense of history back there is awe inspiring; you really get a sense of Americana and can see how diverse this country can be in geography and culture. But they like cold beer as much as us West Coasters, and after awhile it seemed like everyone had an accent of some kind, including myself. If there were some mountains (and the nearest Home Depot wasn't in Connecticut), I could spend a lot of time there.

The glory of the mountains! Nancy supports (or tolerates) my one solace in life, so she must recognize it as the cornerstone to my sanity. Or she enjoys the quiet when I'm not there to 'fix' something in the house. I'm leaning more toward the extended weekend backpacks as age infects my bones, so didn't get to much climbing last year. Five days in Montana's obscure Anaconda-Pintler Wilderness is enough to make any climber want to turn to trekking. Our forty-mile trip walked the spine of the continental divide, in an area that hasn't changed a bit since Lewis and Clark spent some quality time lost there two hundred years ago. The guys and I also revisited the fire lookout on Three-Fingers on a rare but spectacular late September outing. And snow finally caught in us in October on a North Cascade loop with some good elevation gain as the season drew to a close. The golden larch against the fresh snow and the utter silence was poetic. Even though we got a little sun, the temp never climbed out of the 30's all day. Too bad I had my summer bag.

Here's hoping everyone has a happy holiday season and may good tidings and merriment find their way to you and yours.

Best wishes,

