

Am I getting old or is it so long ago that I've forgotten the last time I wrote one of these things? I guess there are two answers to that question and both are yes. One of the good things about Christmas is it comes around every year so if you miss one, there'll be another along in 12 months. Or multiples thereof.

The good news is everyone here still has all the parts they had last time we talked. Some of those bits may be using more sophisticated engineering for comfort and support. You may also notice one of us is wearing his belt a little closer to the Adam's apple but don't worry about hurting his feelings by saying something 'cause all that hair in his ears makes him a little hard of hearing.

Have I written since we dragged the family to Europe? A summer spent flying, driving and taking trains from Ireland to Greece and back through a little bit of Italy. We decided there wouldn't be many more opportunities to travel with the girls - in another year or so they won't want to be seen at the grocery store with either of us let alone hanging out on a beach. At least they were old enough to understand they wouldn't have the chance to travel on the parental dime for much longer. They declared a truce with each other and agreed to tolerate their mother as long as she didn't say much, kept at least 5 feet away from them at all times and wore a burka.

Mark's parents agreed to join us for the chance to see Europe through Rick Steve's Back Door. They've been across the pond a few times but we convinced them it was a different place when viewed from small family hotels - hotels that aren't run by families named "Marriott" or "Hilton", that is. I spent some time setting up accommodations and Mark plotted the route. We spent a week in a small town on the Normandy beaches that was liberated by Canadian forces and then a night on the Passchendaele Ridge just outside of Ypres. It was a chance for the girls to see first hand what it is exactly that we remember on November 11.

Shortly after that our little trek across Europe changed its theme from "Man's Inhumanity to Man" to warriors of the rainbow variety when we arrived in Amsterdam at the start of the 3 day Gay Pride Festival. The girls were much more entertained by this educational experience. The apartment we rented for the few days was on a major canal, was pretty cool in the traditionally scenic sort of way, but had all the modern amenities: kitchen, TV and a bong. Granny learned lots of things on that leg. We also got to meet some of the Dutch relatives - it wasn't hard to pick out Joyce's cousin, same height, same snow white hair, same laugh and same fountain of happy tears - it was uncanny.

By the time we made our way to Greece, Mark's brother, Scott, joined us in Athens. Somehow we all managed to keep this piece of the plans from Granny and Grampa so when he strolled into the breakfast area it paid off with more tears, hugs and laughs - and that was just the guy on the front desk. Actually, most of our trip was spent laying bets on when Joyce would start getting verklempt - bus ride by the Eiffel Tower, dodging traffic crossing the street to the Colosseum in Rome and walking the wall in Rothenburg. All bets were off at places like Anne Frank's House, the Canadian Military Cemetery at Beny-Sur-Mer, the Menin Gate in Ypres - it would take a heart of stone not to be moved by the resonance of those places.

2006 was a year of travel for us. In December we took a drive out to Edmonton for the dedication of a theatre lab in St. Joseph's High School. That was where my dad taught for many years and my sister suffered there for at least 3 of them. I guess he was more memorable to the powers that be so they named the acting space in the new arts wing after him. Auntie Phil and Rosalie flew out for the event and it was great to have a happy gathering of the clan in Edmonton.

Then there was the trip to Mexico...yes, there is more...but this one was on the grandparents ticket and they paid for the whole family - kids, grandkids and those of us related only by having won the lottery in marrying one of their kids. Did I suck-up enough in that sentence? It won't begin to pay back what I've received from Joyce and Clarence over the years but I have to start somewhere.

I think we've just about caught up to 2007. Sorry to drag this out so much and I surely don't want to put y'all through this again so let's just hurry on and hope the next letter won't seem to take a year just to read...

The girls are just about out of the nest. Nicole graduated High School on the Honour Roll in the spring and is still lodged firmly in the basement bedroom while deciding on the next big step. In the meantime she keeps busy searching the spectrum for a new colour to dye her hair.

Rachael is plowing through grade eleven and holding her own. She still doesn't know what she wants to be when she grows up. I've made suggestions about becoming something wild like a C.G.A. (mostly to see the look on her face) or even a veterinarian. She is good with animals and seems to have the science skills to get through the University level courses. But what do I know; I thought being a CGA was a good idea. See, there's that look...

Mark almost managed to circumnavigate the globe in one work trip this year but apparently the ticket price was too high. It was cheaper to fly home from Korea and then, the next day, go 3/4's of the the way around the world in the other direction via Toronto, Frankfurt and Munich to Poti, Georgia (yes, as in Stalin) and back again. As my favorite author P.J. O'Rourke says, "If Christ came back tomorrow, He'd have to change planes in Frankfurt." The upside was spending time in Munich on the connecting flights to and from Georgia. Thanks to the enlightened transportation system in Europe, Mark and his assistant were able to take a train from the airport into downtown Munich where they tucked into a feast of pig knuckles and Weizenbier...Pig knuckles are actually pork hocks the size of large chickens. Forget bratwurst, this is the true Bavarian way to lay down some serious arterial plaque.

I can be found hanging out at the old homestead, doing laundry, cooking meals and all those other things I've been doing 'lo these many years. My paid employment has shifted to a storage company in Esquimalt that's been there for years but no one has ever heard of until they need to store 3 bedrooms worth of furniture tomorrow. When I'm not in the office, I avoid housework by heading for the curling rink after taking a 38 year break from the sport; it's amazing how much has changed in the Roaring Game in that time - and not just my centre of gravity...

Anyway, here's hoping Christmas comes to visit you where you want be found and the New Year brings you success with the health to enjoy it.