

Happy birthday to me. For those new to the phenomenon, this is my solution to my inability to get a Christmas letter composed before Christmas: I do it a month later for my birthday. Last January 27<sup>th</sup> found me mid-step on a Cuban expedition. Even if I'd written my intended letter and posted it from there, it's unlikely some of you would have received it by now (such is the Cuban postal service), so this is going to do double duty for 2006 and 2007.

A benefit of highlighting two years is that my life sounds almost exciting. In fact, I'm enjoying a relatively low-key existence. I bike to IBM four mornings a week and when that is done I bike Lucy across the park to afternoon preschool. The rest of the day is spent corralling children, devising grandiose, occasionally realized plans for the house, and treading the Bermuda triangle between home, the local park and the local supermarket, where most of my time is abducted.

The weather blessed the week leading up to this birthday with bright, clear days. Six cold cloudless sunrises bestowed Victoria with more Canadian-like winter conditions. Ducks spread orange feet on the frozen ponds, the dawn filled with the music of commuters scraping windshields. Then today, I emerged from a basement carpentry project to witness opulent white flakes descending everywhere in the garden. The city's first snow of the year.

I also saw my first snowdrops today. Victoria really has about 10 days of winter and summer, with the rest a protracted spring and fall. From late January until June, flowers in their various clans emerge in rapid succession.

Many of our rituals are built around these growth spurts: pruning trees at Deep Cove in February, celebrating Emma's birthday during the cherry blossoms in April, Mother's Day walks into the alpine meadows in May.



Near the end of 2006's floral invasion, Emma and I accompanied Julie while she presented at an indexing conference in Toronto. The plan was to continue on for a weekend blitz of New York, but a few days before departure, Julie experienced contractions that landed her in hospital. We came close to a medically induced, 8-week-early birth. Julie toughed it out and made the flight to Toronto, but had to pass on the US trip with what was



now considered a pre-existing condition, so Emma and I made the most of a father-daughter 55-hour junket.

I walked off her feet from Saturday morning until Monday afternoon during a typical June heat wave. She's now traversed Central Park, the Brooklyn Bridge and a good portion of lower Manhattan, as well as seen the city from the ferry and top of Rockefeller Center. We took in "Chicago" on Broadway, stayed across from the MOMA at the Warwick (just like the Beatles) and ate breakfast at Tiffany's.

The big news of the summer was the birth of our final child on Aug 24. On the eve of Julie's labour we shared a wonderful evening with some of my extended family at the property in Deep Cove. Emma attended the whole labour, starting with a magical 2 a.m. walk down country lanes under a sky pierced with stars, and ending at the hospital hours later. Julie, positive she was carrying another girl, was incredulous at our pronouncement of a boy, suggesting we were mistaking the umbilical cord for a penis. (Emma cut the longer one.)



The next weekend the as-yet-unnamed baby (who ultimately ended up Jonathan Samuel George Gower) came on his first up-island minigolf tournament, where his dad secured victory number 2 in the Cactus Jack invitational. We continued our mobile baby policy into the fall with our regular pilgrimage to the iconic Saltspring Island Fall Fair. The same month, Lucy started preschool four afternoons a week, so Julie and I luxuriated in afternoons together with the little fella, who has his grandpa's big hands and easy-going, stoic personality.



While Jonathan enjoyed his first Thanksgiving, Halloween, Christmas and New Years (another joint event with my sister's family at the Oddfellow's Hall), Emma rehearsed and performed in her school's production of West Side Story and we prepared for our trip to Cuba.



Our six-week tour was shorter than our journey Down Under when Lucy was a baby, but as complicated to plan since I coordinated my parents and Julie's mom meeting up with us. My travelogue of the trip was featured on [travelpod](http://www.travelpod.com/members/mbgower), and continues to be their top-rated journal for Cuba ([www.travelpod.com/members/mbgower](http://www.travelpod.com/members/mbgower)).







Back in Victoria, my obsessive record collecting gained momentum – a habit that appeared out of nowhere early in 2006. Despite working at a radio station, I never really bought many albums (relatively speaking), but my few hundred existing discs have now swollen to over 1500.

It got to the point where record hunting infiltrated all activities. I left Emma's school camping trip at French Beach to go garage sale hunting in Sooke. I drove everyone nuts with this for a while, but believe I have things relatively under control (although 12" vinyl continues to trickle in).

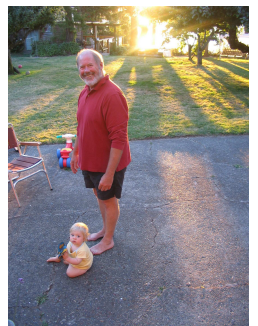
Wafflerama celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> year last June, with a front page B section article in the daily newspaper to prove it. My friend Paul Barron designed a great new logo that I festooned on aprons and t-shirts. I also created a history of the event on the wafflerama.com website.

While Paul fashioned clothing, our friend Craig Fulton designed us a back deck, and then snatched time out of all his commitments to help me build it. This went on against the backdrop of football's Under 20 World Cup, which turned Victoria into a mini-Metropolis for a hot, memorable week in July (I cheered for Japan and Nigeria).

During all this activity, Monique and Omar, who have rented the duplex beside us for over ten years, bought a house and moved across town. They were the perfect neighbours, and though we still see them fairly regularly, it's been a real loss to our little world not to enjoy the spontaneous baked goods exchanges and drop-ins that enriched our lives from the time Emma was in kindergarten. We miss them.

Despite this, Jonathan's first full summer ranks as one of the great times in my life. It started with a great Canada Day camping trip with Brian and Anne-Marie from Vancouver. Julie's mat leave continued until the end of July and I had lots of vacation saved up, so we spent untold hours luxuriating in the family property at Deep Cove. It is such a blessing to have a large, loving family. The generations are getting all convoluted now, so that my cousin's grandkids are older than my offspring. The usual annual events like the square dance, outdoor movie night and Saltspring fair peppered the calendar.

In the autumn, we went on a winery tour among the usual smattering of apple, pumpkin and film festivals. Our friends CJ and Narissa filled in some of the void left by Monique and Omar. Narissa and I have a regular Monday routine that includes a trip to the local playgroup and lunch with Julie. We're hoping their new son Jarrah will become as great a friend to Jonathan as three-year-old Kiran is to Lucy. They can play together virtually unsupervised for about 4 ½ hours before bickering starts.



We continue to be very lucky with child-minding. Our schedules allow one of us to be with the kids almost all the time. Our friend and neighbour Gillian, and Julie's mom, Rosemary, cover one morning a week each.

December was a very busy month for us – even more so than usual. I coordinated my work's kids party at the same time that my sisters and I were planning an afternoon tea for my parents' 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, which took place two days before Christmas. In honour of their honeymoon, we had a Hawaiian theme, complete with hula dancers, leis flown in from Hawaii and a skit. My favourite moment was when everyone sang Moon River while my parents danced in the arc of a spotlight.



As if this wasn't enough on the go, I also decided now was the time to do another wacky community event and organized a rogue bonfire in Beacon Hill Park for the winter solstice. We got rained out and had to move it to our house, but I have plans to reincarnate it as a spring equinox event this March.

During the Oddfellow's Lodge Christmas party, I experienced the odd revelation that the unusual gap in age between Emma and Lucy has given me a skewed view across time. When I took Emma to her early lodge Christmas parties in the mid-90s, there were any number of Gower children and grandchildren in attendance – Gower men have been members in the lodge for close to 100 years. A dozen years later, my teenaged niece and nephew Ellie and Will were there to help, but Lucy and Jonathan were the only descendants young enough to still get gifts. It's an odd thing realizing you represent the end of a legacy.

In a small way, the same thing is happening with Sunday outings. It used to be my sister's family or our friends Jack and Sondra who took part in these, but their kids are on "dates" or working at jobs. Other friends with young kids have stepped into this role now, so we should have another good dozen years of hikes with children before we watch another set of kids spin off into adolescence. Like my grandmother said, you live long enough and you realize everything is cyclical.

