



I spent the night of my last birthday traveling the breadth of Rajasthan by train. From the window of my berth, I lay awake watching a full moon traversing the sky, guiding me toward the Thar Desert that straddles India and Pakistan.

That's a pretty spectacular setting for a birthday, especially when you get to hang out with your eldest daughter on a camel safari – but hardly conducive to writing a Year in Review. So once again I find myself composing a bi-annual birthday letter. In a few pages I need to convey a two-year-period during which Jonathan's age doubled, Lucy lost 12 teeth and Emma concentrated enough life changing decisions to span a decade.

We kicked off my 46<sup>th</sup> year, (near the start of 2009, which seems like a very long time ago indeed) with a quick trip to Mt. Washington, then followed the snow up with a Tiki party. Only two weeks separate our birthdays, so Julie and I latched onto the idea of taking over the indescribable Polynesian common room in my Auntie Dot's building for a kid-friendly night of limbo and umbrella'd cocktails.

We abandoned the kids for our Yellow Point Lodge days in March, then left the junior kidlets behind for a hop down to Portland where Emma and I overdosed on books and records while Julie endured her indexing conference.



About this time I started the Garden Gnomes with some friends. The idea was to make small work of any yard projects by gathering many hands to one house on a Saturday. It's amazing how much easier (even inspiring) it is to chore away in a garden for 4 hours when there's company. The closing food and beverages help clinch the day.

Amid Emma's high school graduation, freezer failures and croquet tournaments, the spring gave way to Wafflerama and the summer time. My favourite non-photographed image of the year has to be the druidic drummers sending the sun down from Moss Rock at the end of the summer solstice. We glanced up as we left Tusa and Rich's house to see a vibrant rainbow perfectly framing the hill and the oblivious wiccans (who continued to stare and drum at the tepid sunset while nature was going crazy in the dusk behind them).

The summer sheltered the usual amazing collection of memories at Deep Cove. My cousin Ken took Lucy on her first ski biscuit ride and prawn outing. Is there anything more fascinating for a kid than snapping the heads off living crustaceans? Julie and I celebrated a joint anniversary party with my sister and brother-in-law, as well as Lucy and Jonathan's birthdays in August. The family held a memorial for my uncle Roy





thing of the past.

I joined a choir to add to the usual bustle of fall fairs, Thanksgiving and hikes, and suddenly Emma was leaving for India. At Hallowe'en, her extended nuclear family headed to Vancouver to see (or should I say "sob") her off to India for 3 ½ months.

It's an odd feeling to have your child simply not around for months. November was hard, but the preparations for Christmas, including practices for my choir's fabulous Home for Christmas performance helped distract us. With the new year my own preparations began for joining Emma in India where I found myself jostled about to the



(and then, this past summer, for my Auntie Emma, whose vivid photographs were given an evening slide show by Chris). As I approach a half century I'm finding more persistent reminders of mortality. I've attended funerals for friends' fathers, brothers and sons. Some time in the not too distant future, there won't be a generation older than us.

The generation younger than us was growing up too. Lucy started grade one in the fall, Emma experienced her first September in 13 years without school (she kept working full time at Cobs Bakery towards her looming trip to India), and Jonathan settled into his preschool. He had a very rocky start in July, poor little fellow. I'm glad his "I don't *want* to go to school" mantra, which was typically the first and last set of words of the day, is a



arrhythmia of a night train on my birthday. And that's the Coles Notes up to January 27, 2010.

Of course Coles Notes sacrifices the soul of a story to tell you its germane facts, and so it is with my summary. Time withers memory. I need the crutch of photos or one of my very infrequent fragments of journal to recall the poetry of the days – the pleasure of a small boy's hand in mine as we trudge through the morning bird song to school.

Even my memories of India have lost the taste of the continent. Half my journal entries remain to be posted online, and I wonder if I've left it too late to invigorate the hasty end-of-day scribbles with the essence of the place.





So like one of Dickens' ghosts, let me tug us ruthlessly forward a year to the present. I'm cycling home late on the eve of my birthday. It is "foggy withal" and the rogue street lights of Beacon Hill Park push startling bands of light around the crippled branches of the bare Gary oak trees. In the haze the stabbing light has an almost sentient quality not unlike the climax of Kubrick's *2001*. It bursts beams of light toward me, and through me also, so that some other being further away might remark the same odd phenomenon of faux sunbeams splitting around my silhouette as I flit phantom-like through the abandoned park.

I've just left choir practice. I love to sing, and to share a learning, creative experience with a bunch of people. We're all so blessed to have Daniel Lapp as a choir leader. He exudes joy and positive energy and somehow synthesizes the chaos he hears around him into song and lovely harmony. It's a renewing experience every week. This night, I wind down before sleep humming the wacky funk tampering he's done to "People Get Ready".

I wake up to the same blanketed atmosphere on the morning of my 47<sup>th</sup> birthday. Fog is something I associate not with late January but with the Fall and riding my bike through the dark morning air as a teenager on my paper route. I consider dozing until the sun gets up, but the kids have snuck into our bed overnight and pilfered the pillows and comforter. I ease into some clothes, throw on a parka to ward off the chill and step out into the predawn.

I've been walking a lot in the mornings this year. A persistent and annoying problem with my hip has confined my physical activities to walking for the most part. It's not what I would call a sexy activity, but I have to admit that if one abandons the digital trappings and distractions, the unplugged mind comes up with fascinating things during the slow panorama of real time perambulation.

I've been thinking a lot lately about technology and how it is changing us; this ties in very well with my area of specialization in accessibility, because technology can have a particularly dramatic and tangible effect on a person with disabilities. Between these reflective walks and the acceleration of digital innovation that I witness in my work and personal life, I'm not only more aware of The Moment, but I'm more aware of its context within the sweep of time. These are extraordinary days. It's thrilling confabulating new

possible directions, plotting how to maintain balance in an era when I have great difficulty foreseeing what the world will look like ten years from now.

The global digital revolution may be unfolding around me, but my physical world revolves around schools on either side of Beacon Hill Park. I pedal the kids in their bike trailer, return home for five hours of working for IBM then repeat the 45-minute school circuit just before Julie arrives home from work.

I'm a fairly social animal and this reclusive work-at-home experience occasionally challenges my sanity. Fortunately, I have a few outlets for camaraderie (with more planned for 2011). When I returned from India and the weather began warming up, I drafted a few willing parents and school





mates of Lucy's to do a weekly after-school jaunt to the rocky beach below the Dallas cliffs. I'm not sure whether the busy kids or lounging adults enjoyed the afternoons more.

Most Tuesday evenings find me at our ex-neighbours Omar and Monique's basement, getting my clock cleaned at table tennis. Along with an occasional foray to the rowing machines at the Y, this is about my only exercise beyond walking. If it weren't for my obscure diet (I only

eat processed sugar on days that are prime numbers), I'd be pretty flabby. Now I understand why they call it *middle* age.

Hmm, so many pages into this letter, and I've barely mentioned anything that happened in the past year.



I returned from India full of stories, and good intentions to crowd them into my travel journal. Unfortunately, I was also full of bacteria that went on a rampaging spring break in my body within a day of touchdown. By the time I had energy to take in my surroundings, it was the next weekend and we were on our way to the Olympics.

I'd booked the week at the Whistler Youth Hostel almost 2 years before the games began. The

lodge on the far side of a frozen Alta Lake felt a long way from the races – and half a world and season away from India. So it was a surreal but recuperative time with the family. We spent only a part of our days in the village or at an event and made time to just play in the snow and relax. We bookended the time at Whistler with two weekends in Vancouver where I got to witness the zip-lining wackiness of Robson Square at night and

the Canada-US hockey final at the huge outdoor venue in False Creek. I've never heard a sound like the roar of that city after the winning goal.

We settled back into routines for the spring: gardening, ballet and swimming lessons after school; tubby time, banjo and Julie's spontaneous stories about Wolf Girl in the evening. I wish she would write down these graphic and convoluted tales. Julie started running the mornings in prep for the Victoria 10K, and kept lengthening her routes through the summer. By last fall, she was clocking 10km three mornings a week, with a couple of runs taking her almost to my folks place in Oak Bay.

I was nowhere near as active, but I did go on a shopping spree in May. As well as a bunch of business





clothes for my presentation to the Ontario government, I also bought a cruiser bike that made jaunts around the neighbourhood much more fun.

My Ontario project had me working absurd hours. Since IBM unilaterally cancelled overtime pay last February, it left me making less per hour advising the government than

Emma pocketed selling bread at Cobs.



The last of my trips to Toronto wasn't for work though. Julie, Emma and I arrived on the eve of the G20 conference to attend my nephew Tristan's wedding. Julie was one of the few wedding guests who fled through phalanxes of riot police, and certainly the only one with a 10" horn-handled carving knife in her bag. I doubt the police would have believed it was a wedding present she was carrying for her niece.

After the wedding party and riots had subsided, we continued on to Montreal by

train with Tristan's brother James and spent a week in his bohemian digs in a vast condemned warehouse in Georgetown. I've never been to Canada's second biggest city before; it's certainly a place I want to experience again.

Back in Victoria, I helped Emma move into her first apartment. Obviously she didn't feel the



need to put too much distance between us, because her place is only a block down the street. While she settled in, Julie and the kids went off with Rosemary for two weeks in Outlook, Saskatchewan where they braved the mosquitoes of one of the wettest summers on record. Julie's roots are in the prairies; I'm so glad the kids got to see where their grandparents and mother spent their days on the lake.

For the rest of the summer, our niece Ellen (with help from cousin Gabe) minded

the kids at Deep Cove. Her brother Will was working up the road at the Smith's garden, so we got treated to lots of their company. Lucy's grandma Rosemary took her to the Lion King in Vancouver for her birthday, on top of the usual beach celebrations.





The early fall found us on Salt Spring twice – once for the usual Fall Fair, and then for the Apple Festival. We had *such* a nice visit with my sister and her beau Henry. Two months later, I passed our camping spot at Ruckle Park again, but this time by boat, when my cousin Paul and I piloted my dad's sailboat through fog to its winter moorage on Pender. November is not a good time to be out on the water, especially if your engine starts failing. We will bring the sail rigging next time!

We had *two* weddings in the family this year. My nephew Jeff tied the knot in North Vancouver in the fall. Both he and Tristan have made wonderful choices for brides, and they provided us with distinctive

ceremonies and receptions that said a lot about who they are. It's too easy to forget how lucky we are with the loving family we have. I'm so glad we got some excuses to share great moments with our extended clan.

We had lots of music in the house leading up to Christmas. Lucy and Julie were both in violin lessons at the Conservatory, the kids practiced parts for their school productions,



and I was gearing up for what turned out to be an amazing Christmas concert with our choir – I'm glad some friends and family got to experience it. Julie's aunt Roberta came out for the holidays, and for the first time, I celebrated Christmas morning in my own home. Although I've enjoyed being a guest at my parents and Rosemary's, it was nice to have the stockings hung above our own chimney.

Links to lots more pictures and stories, as well as my journals for India, Portland and Montreal, are at [wafflerama.com](http://wafflerama.com)

