



decided to skip a letter this year. A multi-deadline pileup crippled its conception. Then my planned theme of a 'family returning to health' got put on life support when my dad was rushed back to emergency the first week of 2016. Yet the morning after my birthday, 5 a.m. found me out of bed, starting to scribble.



Those first promising green shoots of this "January" letter went dormant again while the real plants outside kept pushing out of the ground through the successive waves of late winter and spring. Now, at the end of July, I feel like it's time to nurture it to harvest.



2015 started out in transition and clung to that theme. After a dozen years of part-time consulting work at IBM, I hiked up to full-time and transferred to the US Research wing. A virtual Mike Gower in Ottawa receives a paycheck, but all my co-workers, projects and focus is south of the border (or overseas). I still work from home -- the *comfort* of home, thanks to Jon's birthday gift of an office space heater. Taking on the equivalent of more than an extra day's work a week definitely bulldozed some of life's small pleasures, but I'm overall really happy with the move. I have more projects and staff to manage, and am seeing a broader positive effect of my work.



Right after the fun badminton birthday party Julie organized for my 51st, I succumbed to another of her gentle nudges and joined the Odd Fellows Lodge. Julie's prediction that this would be a good way to spend time with my dad, doing something he loved, bore immediate fruit. My dad ran the initiatory degree from memory, just as his dad had done for him ("He knew all the parts by heart"). The promise of those first lodge meetings altered with my dad's health. Through much of the rest of the year he battled pneumonia, allergic reactions to medication, shingles, skin infections and mental exhaustion. And so, without me there, 2015 would have been the first in 100 years with no Gower in attendance.



2015 was tough in my circle. Parents, aunts, uncles, sisters, nieces, cousins and friends struggled with illness and death. My daughter Emma and her extended family had a very hard year.



Yet there *were* some dandy lighter themes for 2015, like The Year of Poorly Conceived Ideas:

- "I'll save money by building my own wall-sized shelving unit."
- "I'm going to eat only fruit and vegetables for 10 days."
- "Since I didn't grow any, I'll try to resuscitate these dying tomato plants I was given."
- "I'll just dismantle the front-load washing machine to see what's wrong."
- "Maybe I'll buy an extra broken washer for spare parts."



I wasn't cut out to be a Maytag repairman, but I think what Julie views as my fad diet turned out pretty well. Weighing vinyl records to figure out the shelving unit load, I



discovered that my own weight would collapse many models from Ikea; I was the heaviest I'd ever been. That night I bought a juicer and went cold turkey (or whatever the tofu equivalent would be). Ten days later I could fit into most of my wardrobe again. I repeated the same process in 2016, believing that 10 days of forced kale and parsnips is worth 355 days of relatively non-discrete consumption.



If Julie wanted to soak my head over the month-long washing machine fiasco, which of course I carried out in the middle of the room, blocking everyone's way upstairs, there were other ideas she fully endorsed: "Let's buy patio furniture," "Let's ask the vet to make ours the most expensive hamster in the world," "Let's see if Henry has a bike Lucy could use." "Let's go to Hawaii."



The Hawaiian itinerary followed the McClung Don't Mess with Tradition travel plan. Rosemary put us up at the Waikiki Sand Villa, where we'd frolicked many years earlier with my sister Sheila's gang. We splurged for adjoining studios beside the kidney-shaped pool where the kids continued their amphibious existence when we weren't at the beach or on a trek around the island. This time it was Julie's sister and family who learned to snorkel at Hanauma Bay. My main trip regret is not stopping to talk to an old woman sweeping mahogany leaves from the porch of one of the last houses left in Waikiki. What changes she could have described.



Back in Victoria, Lucy intensified violin and dance preparations for various festivals, while Jon spent much of his weekends unenthusiastically kicking around a soccer ball. It would end up being his last season playing footie, but his passion for racket sports continued as he added tennis to squash. Emma began her first year of psych nursing studies.



Spring's extravagance bloomed onward: crocuses, daffodils, the mauve fields of camas. Wildlife encounters on our walks to school through the park included ducklings, cormorants and three-pronged stags. The nesting herons returned in noisy plentitude, forcing us to dodge the ominously white washed pathways beneath their trees.



Old friends Jack, Sondra and Cathy joined me on a quick road trip to Olive Parker's memorial service in Qualicum Beach. I saw them again at Wafflerama, where I attempted a 'Smore waffle (recipe at [wafflerama.com](http://wafflerama.com)), but what I really need to create are more non-death occasions to nurture these relationships! Our second round of kids







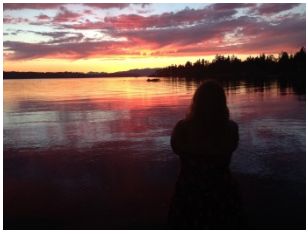
ensures the Macdonalds and their girls – who form an extra set of nieces – share our table on at least a lunar cycle, but once your kids grow up it's logistically challenging and socially awkward to try to coordinate through them ("Hi Emma, when you're done university this term, would you like to have a playdate with Marc and the Showers family?")



June was its usual pile up of end-of-school rituals and garden mayhem: the first raspberries, the final performances, the rushed late plantings. Everyone let out a collective breath as time slowed down for our first sunset at Deep Cove.



July unfortunately was not to be filled only with halcyon days. Killer deer infiltrated deep into James Bay, wiping out most of my garden in a night. Forest fires up-island reduced the weather to a hazy, hacking gloom through which the sun descended into oblivion hours before it reached the horizon. My dad developed shingles that flattened his normally high pain threshold; with the exception of an afternoon tea for my mom's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, my parents largely absented themselves from Deep Cove for the first summer since they travelled to Japan in 1970.



We managed to get in evening trips to Deep Cove between work, summer camps (trumpet and strings), hospital and home visits until mid-July when we became the primary occupants of my folks' room. The kids' fad activity of the summer was square dancing. I used dad's variable speed record player; everyone became very good at Texas stars and other more complex moves. I filled in for dad at the neighbour's field dance as a caller.



August oddities included a circus party, the usual (but still odd) Cactus Jack mini-golf tournament and a gig as back-up singer for David Vest at a Dylan tribute evening at Hermann's jazz lounge. I sculled my rowing shell out to a pod of killer whales. (There came a moment as I drifted there, a few inches of gunnel clearing the water, when I thought it a bit foolhardy.) Just before summer ended, Julie and I snuck in another few days of bliss at Yellow Point Lodge.



September brought school and fairs. I organized another retreat weekend for the BC Fiddle Orchestra (BCFO), where Lucy moved up to the senior group, before heading over to the Saltspring fair at which her drawing took first prize. Jon joined cross country again as well as badminton. On the music front, he added a Suzuki group class to BCFO2 and his private violin lesson; Lucy started a second year in the







conservatory's Collegium program on top of her trumpet and strings at school and BCFO. She also adapted to her new violin teacher Muge's Eastern European approach ("fix that!").



I volunteered with Vote Together during the federal election. Then Rosemary smuggled her daughters and grandkids (and me) together for a weekend in Nanaimo, just before the weather began blowing down trees and generally being unpleasant. The kids compared games (Shooty Skies versus Bloons and Dragonmania) and ate a lot of ice cream. On my side of the family, we booked the Odd Fellow's Hall for an evening of square dancing. It was great having dad well enough to watch. In November, I attended a weekend training session in Vancouver in preparation for chaperoning and organizing an exchange to New Brunswick for the fiddle group. I had a hazily memorable evening out in Gastown with my university friend Magnus and fellow chaperone Monica.



And suddenly the Christmas season was upon us. It was a Next Generation effort at the Odd Fellows kids party; I organized, Rob hosted and Julie played the piano. Emma and David brought Ava for her first official year (along with embryo X, the next in line for the Gower dynasty).



Lucy, Jon and I all performed in the Home for Christmas concert. Julie's Aunt Roberta arrived in time to experience it, while cousin Esme flew in from Winnipeg too late for the shows, but in plenty of time for presents (and Narissa's annual Witty's Lagoon Christmas day hike). Julie opened the pearls for which she had dropped the Most Obvious Hint of Her Life. I gave away over 100 duplicate records to the next gen. Lucy got some gerbils to replace the death of Captain EO the hamster, who got a 25% extension on life thanks to an operation whose cost would have purchased enough hamsters for the kids to have enjoyed, in series, until they retired from whatever their occupations turn out to be ("Totally worth it!" Julie adds).



A fluke of the booking system let us take a bunch of next-gen Gowers (and honorary members) to Yellow Point for an overnight of games and visiting on January 2<sup>nd</sup>. It was a fluke we hope to reproduce.



And so into 2016 and the first school morning, rising in the semi-dark and walking towards dawn's brief blush.

I'm embarrassed to say I'm finishing last year's letter when this year is now two-thirds over. Emma and David have had baby George. Yesterday he met Jeff and Debbie's first, India, and Natalie and Ryan's second,





Lauren. It was a three-baby day at Deep Cove. With Sarah, Jill and Kristel's visits in July with Parker, Ella and Tessa, it's been the summer of new Gowers out here. None of these squidlings actually share the family name, as they spill into the fourth generation, but we all receive the incredible gift of sharing this space. And for that, I am, truly, thankful.

