



Welcome to the belated birthday letter of Michael Brooke Gower, a traditional retelling of the past year's activities, now spanning a fickle 15-year period.

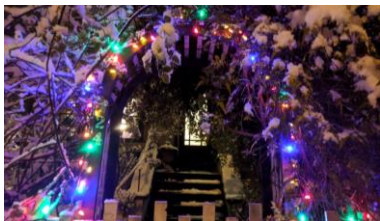
I say fickle, because very few letters have been delivered or even written by my end-of-January natal festivities. Multiple years have been broached in one telling.



With Facebook offering an effortless means of recalling the past, I've been wondering lately about the value of this exercise, this difficult pleasure: scrabbling through what are now thousands of images on multiple devices to find a decent record of the year, and then using the resulting photographs as apparatus to help in spelunking through my waning gray matter in search of colourful moments. Here are 2017's results...



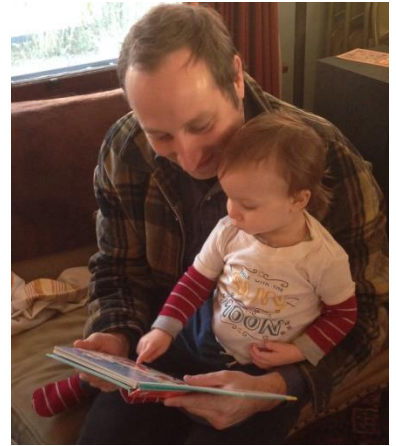
The year began with the traditional cacophony of sparklers, friends and clanged pots. It passed in muted oblivion; Julie and I turned in at 8:30 on Dec. 31<sup>st</sup>, victims of the flu that hacked its way through the land in December. (We discovered later that many friends and family also aborted celebrations due to illness, which I guess is another kind of sharing.)



Those opening and closing moments are not the things that define the year for me, though. Snow *may*. It sugared the first day of the year. It arrived as a muffling gift on the cusp of Julie's birthday. It descended in glory on Christmas Eve, blessing Victoria with the third White Christmas of my lifetime.



Music formed another motif. Lucy performed with BC Fiddle Orchestra to a boisterous crowd at Mayne Island's Campbell Bay Music Fest. The teens had giggle-worthy run-ins with Gulf-Islands transportation and aged hippie skinny-dippers. A similar crowd and vibe was present in August when Jon's Dance Band played Hornby Island's festival at what must be one of the most beautiful properties on a beautiful island. We jammed with the Lapps at Mt. Washington in February and sang with the Hoggs in December, in between winning competitions and taking part in concerts at Alix Goolden, square dances at Deep Cove, and old-time hootenannies at Strawberry Vale







Hall. My folks attended a vibrant 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration for the Performing Arts Festival at Government House with Julie and me.

The ocean surrounds Victoria and encompasses so many activities in a year. The weekend of Wafflerama, we found a new 12' fiberglass sailboat, perfect for the stiff breezes at the summer place. A hollering adventure into rough seas with Jon is just one of the more dramatic of the many brisk trips on an afternoon's wind out of Patricia Bay. (Taking my dad out on a smooth trial run, and witnessing Lucy's less smooth nautical adventures with neighbour Suzie are other picks.)

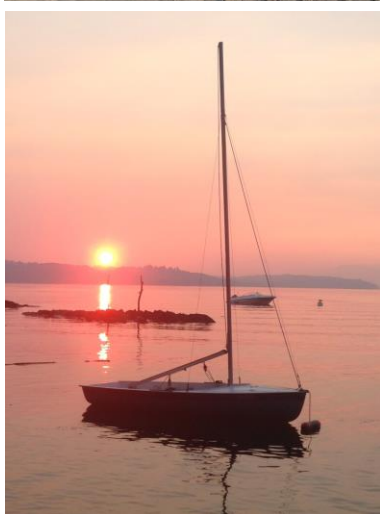


In quieter moments, I sent my rowing shell across a summer morning's sheen on the Saanich Inlet. The same waters also bore various skiers and tubers behind Ron's powerboat, and buoyed up any number of fanciful inflatables, which culminated in a flotilla of pineapples, doughnuts, watermelons and avocados in the bay.

I saw my first whales (other than orca) one morning as I jogged onto the Dallas. They spouted plumes and slapped their tails on the rough skin of the sea. I followed eastward, pointing out their passage to anyone I encountered, as if proclaiming the Second Coming. Some of us gathered at Clover Point in time to see one fully breach quite near shore, a joyful defiance of gravity's inexorable pull.

Back on land, we harvested and prepared its bounty: the miraculous succession of pies Julie baked from our wee, solitary peach tree; the rich, red berries and straight orange carrots from the garden. In February I trimmed barren apple trees, first at Madrona with my cousins Ron and Kathy, then solo on the regenerated red gravenstein at Rosemary's. In September Jon and I gathered the fruit from among the green leaves. We stirred the fruit cakes on Remembrance Day, just as my family has done my whole life, and Julie bedecked them with her home-made marzipan at Christmas.

In a year's worth of comfy dinners at Rosemary's and Sunday afternoons idling with newspapers, there still occur moments where we acquiesce to time's persistent pull. The day after the memorial for the eldest of my







father's siblings, Uncle Jim, who tended the land most of his 100 years, some of we younger relatives hauled the recalcitrant remains of one downed fir tree up the bank at the summer place. The toil of transforming that scattered chaos of massive fir rounds into neatly stacked firewood formed a joyful tribute.



In June, I drove straight from an overnight trip chaperoning Lucy's graduating middle school class to Jon's ceremony for leaving Sir James Douglas Elementary. In three years Jon will go from being one of these innocents in an auditorium squealing delightedly at their baby photos to one of 100 physically developed adolescents expressing raw feelings around a campfire. It made me aware of how rapidly my kids' time as children is fleeing.



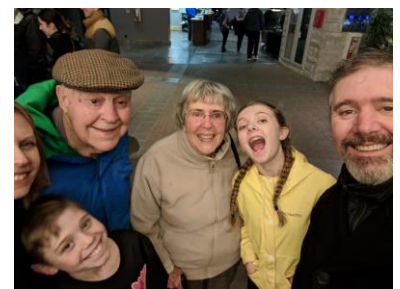
We waved good-bye to veteran neighbours Sam, Krista and Isaac about the same time that Jon's friend Jonas left James Bay. Neither family went far afield (Jon rode his bike over to Jonas's new digs in Fairfield today while I wrote this), but it does complete the exodus of school-aged friends from the 'hood. I like to think this just spreads our friend pool further afield for activities like the dip we took in Portage Inlet with Rebecca's crew near their new place in Vic West; but I miss the more frequent and spontaneous encounters with folks on the block. Off-setting this, nephew Eli moved back to school in Victoria at the end of the year, so Jon anticipates a lot more board games and excursions with him and Karen.



Speaking of departures, we said good-bye to Jon's beloved hamster Brittany. Her acrobatic hijinks from the top of her cage were worthy of a Tom Cruise stunt double. Unfortunately, Lucy's gerbils are not the only rodents left in the house. A persistent family of mice (and a grumpy rat) has discretely (and sometimes not so discretely) made itself at home in the basement. We've assayed some humane and not so friendly responses, but they still aren't getting the Unwelcome message.



We celebrated some special occasions this year: Emma hosted our grandson George's first birthday in her lush green backyard (David and I had a fun time prepping with various powered gardening implements). My cousin Katie







became the latest relative to knit her love of the Deep Cove property into her nuptial plans. Calling her wedding “intimate” conjures an initially accurate picture of serenity at odds with some of the wackiness that ensued in the after-hours amongst cousins.

Sixty years after their honeymoon, my parents’ anniversary closed off the year. Three generations of their offspring gathered together on Salt Spring Island to toast the occasion.

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I just got back from another year of trimming Rosemary’s tree today. I pruned it hard, like this letter, sawing away at thick limbs and fanciful offshoots. The tree looks great, but I feel like I’ve snipped a bit too aggressively at this letter, which has no mention of the daytime drop-ins by George and Emma, our 3-week trip to Spain, afternoon walks with Karen, or Lucy’s last ballet performances. Those and others are described in the year’s pictures at

[wafflerama.com](http://wafflerama.com)

