

Here follow fragments of two years of pandemic and post-pandemic living, to celebrate another term on the planet (Jan 2021-Jan 2023). More photos at wafflerama.com

February, '22

I'd intended to wrap my letter for 2021 between my 58th birthday on January 27 and Julie's 50th on February 10. Then Wordle happened.

A daily word puzzle that lets me do statistical analysis on letter frequency, then broadcast victories and defeats to friends and family? That kind of fun, social triviality is exactly what this tired world craves.

For most of us, 2021 was the first year completely constricted by the effects of a pandemic. Stilted physical interaction. Crimped horizons (the furthest I travelled was to a neighbouring *smaller* island). Less fun.

Still, there was stuff to like. I suspect many folks in my corner of the world have often found sufficiency in the small Wordle-like pleasures in life. That or joined enraged truck rallies.

The year was made more dramatic not just by the pandemic but the weather. The seasons on which events took place were present, but so extreme that new words entered our vocabulary to describe them. A heat dome heralded the hottest summer on record, an atmospheric river, the wettest fall. During one of the coldest stretches of any year, *Victoria* got a white Christmas.

I was outside more, experiencing it all. By my prior birthday (#57), I was walking long sojourns on predawn Saturdays with my Auntie Doris. We'd set out just before 6 am, then walk around James Bay beneath stars or streetlight-illuminated clouds, once puzzling over a necklace of moving lights stretching the limits of heaven's dome. (Turned out to be Elon Musk's Starlink satellites launching.) The pale promise of dawn seeped into the east earlier each week. By the time Doris and Berk moved out of their condo in June, the whole walk took place in daylight.

Among the stories, poems, song and silence of those 2-hour walks, Doris mentioned intermittent fasting, and it became a yearlong experiment for me. I stopped eating right after dinner – about 7:30pm – and didn't eat until halfway through my workday, about 10:30am. I still stuffed three meals down my throat, yet by summer I'd dropped over 10 pounds. Once the daily rows, work





projects, and long walks of Deep Cove receded, I drifted up but stayed leaner.

They say an apple a day keeps stuff at bay, and it's not just when you eat them. Lots of ideas sprouted from seeds in 2021. I created a boardgame about apples. I trimmed and nurtured not just a yard but parts of a whole orchard on multiple visits to Brian and Peri's, ate a lot of Julie's inspired pies (never underestimate the power of a bald hint: "Still a lot of apples down there!"), and on a grim note, closed out the year debating what to do with the toppled King of Tompkins County apple tree at Deep Cove. The magnificent specimen that fed and sheltered us, that held many children's secret nests and perches, uprooted in one of the rough storms in November.

My cousin Ron and I ate the last pieces of pie ever made from its apples after we finished pruning, which without the King, took about half the usual time. The yard looks bare without it.

Deep Cove's other tragedy in 2021 happened during June's heat dome. The large tides that exposed the mud flats to midday sun cooked the mussels, barnacles and oysters in their own juices. Our tenant described the incoming tide more as a reddish gel than water. (The rotting smell of millions of oceanic creatures greeted our arrival on Canada Day the next weekend, and lingered through the first week.)

We were still in town for June's hottest days. We escaped Sunday's peak temperatures at Parker Beach in Cordova Bay with my cousin Cynthia Slagboom's family, where the temperature dropped with every descending step from the parking lot to a very pleasant 25 at the water. Back in James Bay, it was still hot enough at 11:30 pm that I stripped and cooled down in the ocean off the Dallas.

This weather coincided with house work at Government Street. Roofers ascended the mornings of the hottest weekdays, while inside Hans de Goede built a hallway off the kitchen, giving Jon a bedroom with 4 walls instead of draped fabric. Since Lucy had just finished high school that week, some would say we're a little late with these renos, but she's doing her nursing degree at Camosun and UVic, so we'll have 2 kids at home for at least 4 more years.

Lucy's pandemic graduation included a private fashion show (where Julie donned her green 80s gown before Lucy took a turn in it, followed by her own royal blue, floor-length stunner) and





very public car rally. Julie rented a convertible, Karen, Eli and Jon decorated, the neighbours organized a send-off, and we were soon joining a loose collection of bedecked cars driving into Esquimalt. From the celebration at the parking lot start at Naden, past the folks waving from the streets of the community, to the family meet up at Saxe Point, it really was delightful. Some parents organized an outdoor grad in Memorial Park, so Lucy got to dance away her high school years on what was then the hottest evening on record. She also graduated from BC Fiddle Orchestra and, a month later, emerged as a force to be reckoned with in mini-golf. Both she and Jon took awards at the annual Cactus Jack event.

At the other end of the K-12 system, George and his dinosaurs entered kindergarten in the fall. He's a source of love and anecdotes for all his relatives. I had the oddest water fight with him when Emma and her cousins, "The Three Es," hosted a square dance in the summer (if it can be called a fight when one party welcomes every drop of moisture and offers no opposition). With the return of Tristan and his family to the west coast, George now has his own near-age cousin Isaac to debate the lore of monstrous lizards. I'm sure it will seem mere seconds before they're taller than us; Jon and Lucy both grew like weeds this past year, and Emma is now the shortest one in the family

Walks also continued at our time at Deep Cove. Julie and I traipsed across the entire North Saanich peninsula, learning the contours of the paths and some of the original placenames (our bay is KUEKEWET).

It was the second year the pandemic forced us to divide the overnight property use by family wing. I missed the intermingling across the broader family, but it did give Julie and I our own dedicated room during the Frank Gower's two 10-day stretches. It also let our hard-to-coordinate wing spend lots of quality time together, including raucous evening games.

Walks and projects took us through the remainder of the year. With Julie and I both working across the room from each other upstairs, one of us would call out "walk?" and we'd set out to the waterfront, regardless of weather. That daily stroll, hand-in-hand with my beautiful wife along the edge of the Pacific, was the best part of the pandemic.





March '22

We just celebrated the second anniversary of the pandemic. I think celebration is the right word, given this week also marked the end of required mask wearing (although I'm typing this on a plane, where they are still de rigueur). I'm on my way to the same conference that had its rug pulled out two years ago. Sadly, the aged 1-day ticket to Disneyland won't get me into a park where reservations are now required, so the Magic Kingdom will remain elusively on the other side of the moat from my hotel.



The world really has this pandemic refined to a system. I discovered last night at 10pm, on the eve of my trip, that I needed a test on the way *down* to the States, not just the return. I was able to find an online proctor, stuff a large stick into the part of my brain closest to my nose, and get the results back before midnight. That's such a change from the closed tennis courts of two years ago (although we seem to have lost that sense of unity derived from banging pots together on porches and balconies).



January '23

The sun fought its way out yesterday morning while I was detaching Christmas lights from the house. Just like that, birds began chirping on the cherry tree near my ladder. I noticed the buds swollen on the branches. Early promises of spring.



We've been hosting family and friends over for table tennis and foosball in the days since 2023 started. It's a chance to enjoy the labour that's gone into making the ground floor habitable. When the pandemic shut things down again in 2022, I took on ridding the basement of rats and water and cold. Gone is the ancient oil furnace and tank, the damp French drain tiles exposed under a crumbling concrete floor, the asbestos strapping on the ducting, the rodent-soiled, bug-infested insulation...



No one would consider it a 'finished basement', but it's a cozy space warmed by a heat pump. Our arid fall and winter aren't taxing the revamped drainage system, so until the next climate-triggered monsoon, it remains untested for water-tightness.



Beyond the house, I got involved in a lot of maintenance work these past years too: deck upgrades at the Three E's; painting Rosemary's house; revitalizing the flowerbed at mom's; ivy pulls, seawall and deck work at Deep Cove; a new addition for my grand-niece Hannah... I wasn't the driving force on most of these things, but it's nice to offer a hand and learn a few skills.

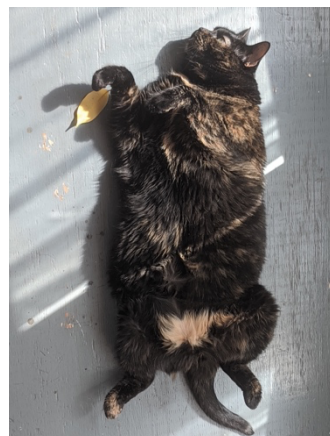




We hosted my cousin Jen's two felines back in 2021. The kids lived on the sofa with these beasts draped over them like they were all stoned on catnip. The experience led to a Julie-coordinated hunt for our own new pet at the start of '22. We ended up with something more closely resembling a beached harbour seal than a cat. Figgy is a big-boned beast that quacks. Her indolent ways have made the house a more tranquil abode, except when she inexplicably goes feral (usually attacking Lucy).



We finally burst from our pandemic bubble in mid-22. Jon and I assayed an extended weekend in the Big Apple; Julie and Lucy paid a longer visit to Big Ben and environs. Jon and I kayaked the Hudson, mini-golfed on a pier, and never went to bed before 1am. The Slagboom girls happened to be in town, so we coordinated a Saturday together with the stuffed critters and cut gems at the Natural History Museum then shared front-row (balcony) seats at a Yankees game. Jon and I also enjoyed a warm, windless evening atop Rockefeller Center, took in Manhattan on a sunset cruise and generally did a bunch of romantic activities better reserved for Julie, who is the only one who hasn't been there. In hindsight, riding our rental bikes helmetless down Second Avenue was idiotic (but fun).



Julie and Lucy arrived in London, letter of introduction in hand, for their private tour of the Houses of Parliament. A transportation strike had them walking 30+ kms some outings, with only a daytrip away from The City to Windsor. The seeds of that trip were planted months earlier during a celebratory dinner with friends Jennifer and Les at the Empress, where the monarchist women formed a pact to visit the queen together. Jenny joined Julie for the second half of the trip, while Lucy enjoyed some nightlife with friends, coincidentally in town.



While they swanked around London, I drove to Grand Forks with my mom and sister Sheila to attend Lawrie Garvin's memorial. The family of Bev and Lawrie Garvin figures strongly in my formative years, from our first Christmas together in Kimberley when I was six through sun-infused summers and snowy winters at their cabin at Wasa Lake in the ensuing decades. Recounting those times, and Lawrie's life, with four generations of Garvin clan was a real blessing.



Julie passed on our romantic August break at Yellow Point in favour of whatever indexers do at a conference, so I took my mom instead. She's gifted us our January birthday time at YP as a combined present for years; it was lovely returning the favour. We chatted and swam our way through three hot days and balmy evenings.





2022 marked a few other milestones and changes: Julie's 50th birthday and 25th year at the Legislature, the 40th anniversaries for Wafflerama and my high school grad, the end of Rob's term as mayor of Colwood. Rosemary got a new hip. Julie took on a new job in the Clerk's Office, and organized Hansard's 50th anniversary. Emma ended the year earning a new role in her ministry. New family additions Josiah (Tristan & Alice) and Josie (Gabe & Steve) experienced their first Deep Cove moments. I can't wait to see Ainsley & Richard's first, Aiden, guide new grandpa Ken around next summer.



Oddest moment of '22? Rosemary detouring past roadblocks to drop Jon at Cedar Hill, where he practiced squash on inexplicably empty courts. Meanwhile, an armed robbery and shoot out a few blocks away had shut down most of Saanich.



We also enjoyed the repeats of those things dreams are made of: breathless evenings at Deep Cove, either arcing behind Ron's boat on a glass-smooth inlet (none of the kids have yet made it long on one ski) or watching an epic sunset fill the sky; breakfasts for hundreds, dinners for two, laughs and games with friends and family, the perfect shot, the wind in our sails.



Victoria experienced its second white Christmas in a row. Holiday concerts for the Joy of Life choir and Coastline (the fiddle group Lucy joined this fall) took place before the snowfall caused chaos on the solstice. Many plans got altered, including visits from Julie's cousins. Alison made it in time to spend Christmas with her mom Roberta (newly relocated here). Esme delayed her gratification until the next week. It meant we got a chance for extended visits, which we hope repeat.



And so, into 2023. I wrap up my role as Noble Grand for the Victoria Odd Fellows tomorrow. I agreed to a second year in 2022, thinking it would be nice to have a 'normal' year, only to be off-footed by another year of pandemic. There were challenges, but fun events along the way too.

Julie and I get a much-needed break this coming weekend with our winter stint at Yellow Point, a birthday gift from my Mom, and one of countless blessings. We feel incredibly lucky in the life we have, in sickness and in health. May that be said of all of us.

