

The exceedingly mild winter of 2014-2015 saw an early dwindling of porcupine activity on the porch following our delightfully unprecedented porcupine explosion in December. By the end of February, only Night Ranger was still showing up, and he disappeared by mid-March. We hoped that the lack of snow and warm temperatures had led them to other food sources and adventures, but I still worried about them. To our sorrow, we discovered Squeak's body at the end of March, no more than a day or two old. We were heart-broken to lose our best and oldest porcupine friend, apparently the victim of a fall from one of his favorite tree across the gully from our house. He lay where he fell, and we buried him there like a Pharaoh with an apple slice clutched in one paw, piles of sunflower seeds, and salmonberry leaves. I'm sure that no wild porcupine was ever so loved as Squeak. We hope that his long disappearances from the porch last fall resulted in a baby Squeak or two this spring, and that our other missing porcupine friends saw better fates.

2015 was my 20<sup>th</sup> high school reunion. My best friends from my own class, Rory and Kellee, weren't planning to come up for the July celebration so we decided to celebrate on our own by renting a house for the weekend at Cannon Beach on the Oregon coast in March. We drove there from Portland and spent our time primarily engaged in eating Rory's gourmet fair and talking endlessly, with a little bit of wandering around the town and beach. We all agree that it seemed impossible to make the same kind of friends after high school.

With the early spring, I was able to get my biannual maintenance done on the *Ronquil* early, so it was ready to go by April. I heard that the ice was out on the Taku River early as well, and that got me thinking about hooligan again (we'd been iced out the year before). When I heard from the lodge that the run was on, the weather looked questionable, so I decided to fly up with the help of my dad who wanted to fly over the place anyway. Chris and I arrived one Friday morning in April to a brown and gray and more or less snowless land and iceless river. We could see from the wildlife that the hooligan run was still underway and soon set out fishing from the canoe. When dipnetting efforts failed (the tidal current carrying us far upriver), we tried deploying a small herring gillnet from shore just in front of the cabin, weighting it to sit on the bottom of the channel. Our first set was poorly executed and the net ran practically parallel to shore, so we immediately pulled it to try again. You can imagine our shock to find 17 hooligan in the net already! All in all, we were successful beyond our most optimistic imaginations, bringing in 252 hooligan in half a dozen sets during the high tide that day and the next. It was the most satisfying fishing we'd ever done, bringing load after load of purple-silver fish up from the muddy river. We roasted two for dinner the first night and smoked the rest at home.

I made one trip to Snettisham in mid-May to open up, finding the compound in typical spring condition (good with some water line issues to fix). Then Chris and I were off to another type of adventure: road trip! We flew to Tampa, Florida, in late May where Chris purchased a 1980 Chevy LUV in prime condition with only 50,000 miles. Neither of us had ever been on a long road trip and were looking forward to working our way back to Seattle over the next five or six days. Unfortunately, adventure struck, and we broke down about 100 miles from Tampa on a Friday night. Although a mechanic was able to diagnose the problem Saturday morning, all shops close in that part of Florida at noon on Saturday, so we were left to while away the rest of the weekend before learning our fate. Long story short, the carburetor rebuild kit we needed was ordered from North Carolina on Monday and showed up on Tuesday and we finally escaped the

90 degree, flat, featureless humidity of central Florida Wednesday afternoon. The highlight of the five day layover was camping Monday night in a lovely wooded park where gray foxes roamed all night long, barking hideously near the tent (not to mention the fireflies and the frog and toad we watched feeding in the light outside the outhouse and the turtle who wandered across a path while we read Agatha Christie to each other in an old-timey gazebo).

With Georgia on our minds, we left Wildwood and headed toward the freeway, managing to blow a tire on the way. A local helped us lower the spare (probably the original) from under the bed (we didn't have the proper tool for that) and pointed us towards a tire repair shop four miles away. We were very relieved to win Georgia a few hours later, only to break a belt half way to Atlanta. This happened just as the last shop was closing, so were forced to overnight in a hotel again. But at last Chevy LUV was ship shape the next morning and we headed north again, jaggging into Alabama so I could visit the Gilbreath Graveyard in De Kalb County where my great-great-grandparents are buried along with a variety of other Gilbreath relatives (this required hopping some barbed-wire fences and trespassing across a huge hay field). That day, Chris drove 16 hours before we stopped for some sleep at the Camelot Inn (trucker friendly!) in Missouri. We camped the next night at Buffalo Gap in South Dakota, then on the Yellowstone River in Montana, and finally at Potholes in central Washington before rolling up on Chris's parents ten days after we started.

Back in Juneau I continued with summer, prepping for some improvements at Snettisham. After a trip there and one up the Taku in June, Chris, Rob, Katie, and I chartered a float plane to Karlie Lake, 3,000 feet up in the Berner's Bay watershed, for 4<sup>th</sup> of July weekend. We camped along the edge of the alpine lake and hiked up the ridge that encircles it, gazing at the vertical cliffs on the opposite side that drop down into one of the river bottoms of the watershed. It was a spectacular weekend of stunning views and great food and friends.

Shortly thereafter, the Gilbreth family gathered in Juneau including Jeannette, Ben, and Ayzling, Jeannette's parents John and Valerie, Vicki, and (though we saw little of them), Ben's parents as well. We spent the first weekend at Snettisham, just about two years after Ayzling's first appearance there as an infant, and I had the honor back in Juneau of seeing my next cousin on an ultrasound and learning his sex that night at a king crab party at my parents' house (the blueberry cupcakes indicated boy!).

A few weeks later, Chris and I made our annual pilgrimage to Pavlof Harbor and had our most fun and successful trip yet. It didn't hurt that the weather was spectacular all weekend, sunny and lovely, and that we both adopted a more relaxed and optimistic viewpoint than usual. The cohos seemed to be just arriving in the bay and hadn't made their way over the falls yet, so we concentrated on fishing the channel between the falls and the bay where we could see schools coming in and out or lingering in the deeper pools. We caught two cohos the first evening (we don't normally even attempt to fish after we arrive), then caught four more the next day before returning to camp to a potential catastrophe. The bear activity had been steady all day at the falls, and a sow and cubs (we believe) had visited camp on their way and destroyed both our inflatable tenders (one inflated, the other all bundled up). They also overturned our tote of supplies and punctured the wine (which was really the worst part), mercifully leaving our tent and personal gear alone. For the second time in our six trips to Pavlov, the harbor was empty of boats (and

potential rides), but we'd seen a couple of jet skis come in earlier, so I ran back to the creek in the hopes that they'd still be there and could give me a ride. They did, somewhat disappointing Chris's heroic ambitions to swim to the boat. I brought the Kathy M in and we decided to camp on board for the night rather than figure out a creative way to keep the boat floating at high tides while still accessible without a tender. While Chris struck the tent, I loaded the rest of our gear and secretly transformed the cluttered back deck into a lounge, complete with camp chairs and cook stove. We ate a late dinner of stuffing, peas, and fresh coho while anchored off the mouth of the channel, floating on a glassy bay with the waterfall and two brown bears in sight and no other boats. The Kathy M was amazingly comfortable for sleeping, and we fished from it the next morning, bringing in another four fish before serendipitously returning home a day early and missing a big southeasterly storm we didn't even know was coming!

Back at the homestead I was making progress on two fronts. For the first time in the three years I've been planning it, I managed to make multiple longer trips to Snettisham over the course of the summer. I didn't manage a week each month, but I did take about seven days in June, seven days in July, and ten days in September when I closed up. With the mild winter and early spring (we again had extraordinary sunshine in April and May), I started going barefoot again in February (with some breaks during brief snowfalls), determined to make better progress over the summer. Though I stayed barefoot most of the time I was outside in town or in the wilderness, I was disappointed to not reach the next level of barefoot comfort; it seems unlikely I ever will without more drastic barefoot time, which I am not especially motivated to do. It didn't help that our summer turned rainy, handily breaking July's rainfall record, which tenderizes feet. We still saw sunny weekends, though, so I didn't see much cause for complaint.

I also made it to the Taku cabin three times over the course of the summer following the April hooligan run, enjoying some of the best birdwatching I've ever had there (highlights were my first American redstarts and alder flycatchers). We made progress toward a new trail behind the cabin, I finished widening the trail upriver, and cut over 50 spruces in the last meadow at the northern edge of our property in an effort to retain some private nagoon meadows. Other than that, I engaged in a lot of tramping, berry picking (a great crop of blueberries and nagoonberries), and canoeing the slough. In order to help my parents close up, I flew to the lodge on its last deadhead at the end of September and met up with Mike Ward, who was kind enough to let me look through his historical collection and returned to me two precious books from my childhood (long mourned) and a bear hide my dad took in Snettisham in the 60s that had been tucked away in the attic. Among other tasks at the cabin that trip, we began working again on protecting the riverbank which continues to erode rather badly.

Down at Snettisham, I finally started staining the insides of the cabins, something I've wanted to do for years. I started in Cottonwood with excellent results, then turned to the lodge which took considerably more effort given the large wall space, abundant wall furniture, and especially the ceiling. But the major accomplishment was the addition of satellite internet. More energy and frustration went into this system than I'd care to admit, beginning with a five-hour "training" in town with a HughesNet rep following many frustrating email exchanges where I never quite learned what I wanted to know. The first hang up on site was the inability to physically mount the dish on the front of the lodge as intended because the overhanging porch roof blocked the satellite. I temporarily mounted it on the lower deck without trouble, but ran into senseless

technical problems right off the bat. It took three trips down there and more frustrating and fruitless exchanges with the HughesNet rep before he finally discovered (from someone else) a strange little bug that prevents the system from working when using one of the setup links I was told I could use to assist with pointing the satellite. The long saga is all contained in trip reports, but suffice to say that I did eventually get the system up and running in mid-July and even mounted it on a pole later in the summer, pouring concrete for the first time at Snettisham (in my tenure). Being able to keep in touch with Chris, check the marine forecast, and even do a bit of forgotten work on my long trips down there was worth every penny.

Cailey continued as a good adventure dog over the summer, impressing me with her comfort in the various aircraft she traveled in as well as the boat and canoe and on any crazy hikes we wound up on. On the way back from the last Taku trip, she leaped a good six feet straight up into my lap in the helicopter before anyone could hand her up. She also caught her first (to my knowledge) prey this summer, an enormous meadow vole from beneath the branches of a spreading spruce tree at the cabin.

I closed up Snettisham with a long solo stay from one weekend through the next and helped my parents with the Taku cabin two weeks later. Although a couple of August weekends weathered in town helped me get a jump start on fall chores, everything piled up as I overlapped an entire month of summer with the first month of fall semester. In January I'd begun attending the "Tlingit Language Learner's Group" at the library, an informal group of community members interested in learning and perpetuating the endangered Tlingit language. While the group was highly enjoyable and I was learning bits of the language there and through independent study, I knew that real progress would only come through more formal study. So, beginning August 31, I began attending evening classes two nights a week at the University of Alaska Southeast. While I was alert through each class, it took a toll on the pace of fall activities and my general energy level, which diminishes anyway with the waning light. At the end of the semester in December, I returned to the learner's group considerably more confident and relaxed, enjoying a brief few weeks of rest during winter break. In the middle of the semester, I also had the honor to attend the 2015 Clan/Sharing Our Knowledge Conference where I spent three days immersed in and remembering how much I enjoy anthropology and listening to quite a handful of the remaining fluent Tlingit speaks and some of the younger generation learning the language.

This year I also attended more dances, both ballroom and contra, and enjoyed having that a part of my life again (I've even signed up for waltz/swing lessons next semester). I also allowed myself to embrace genealogical research, starting from the work of my aunt Vicki. I now have a family tree online that includes about 700 people and finally have a solid handle on my ancestry and the many names that have floated untethered through family stories. It's an overwhelming and endless task, but predictably addictive, and I have to resist the urge to delve into it when I have free time at the exclusion of my local historical research project (going rather slowly). With the ease of photographing (with my phone) records and photos, I am quickly gathering a large digital library of family letters and photographs.

Despite a seemingly overwhelming schedule dominated by classes, new chores, and house maintenance (dreaming all the while of the time when I might begin historical and genealogical research again), I finally accepted the invitation of my high school friend Eric and his wife Patty

to visit Taiwan with them. Eric met Patty (who is Taiwanese) while living there in the early 2000s, and invited me to join them on a return visit. Over the course of a week, Eric tirelessly took me to some of his favorite places around Taipei and humored my personal interests to seek out temples and birds, all the while sharing his favorite foods, interpreting Chinese, and generally being an excellent and enthusiastic guide. For once I took an exotic trip without very much planning, as I had a knowledgeable guide to lead the way. I didn't expect to love Taiwan, and it certainly wasn't on my top list of places to visit, so I was surprised when I took so well to the bustling city, not to mention the gorgeous mountains surrounding it; overall, I was really taken with Taiwan and would heartily recommend it. The Taiwanese are extremely gracious and polite and the culture and nature rich and fascinating. My favorite souvenir is a purple billed hat given to me by an older gentleman hiker when he saw me walking in the rain, which says "ruffiandiamondbombwillbeignitedsoon" circling a diamond hand grenade.

We went on several hikes through the jungley broadleaf forest in the mountains surrounding Taipei (and the arrow bamboo that blankets the mountaintops), visited many temples (mostly Taoist, with some Buddhist and at least one Confucian) where we learned how to make the proper circuit of incense offerings to all the gods, rode a gondola to a mountainside of small tea plantations, visited the outskirts of Taipei at the mouth of the Dansui River, paid homage at Chiang Kai-shek's tomb in the company of Patty and her father (an ROC immigrant as a boy), and tasted tea in the middle of the "Oriental Beauty" tea growing region. I thoroughly enjoyed all of it and would love to return and explore the rest of the country. I carried my binoculars everywhere I went and was rewarded with some fantastic bird encounters. Of the 18 birds I identified, three were endemic species and six endemic subspecies.

Back home, December continued to be as mild as the rest of the fall, which started out with the nicest stretch of clear October days I can remember and the best fall colors (or maybe we could just see the fall colors better this year). The weather broke mid-December and Christmas saw unusually appropriate weather—clear on Christmas Day with snow on the ground, then a winter wonderland of snowfall the next day. Chris and I cross-country skied twice over the weekend. We were also very happy when Lucy began intermittently returning to the feeder in November (she'd made one surprise appearance in August, scratching on the door and eating quite eagerly from our hands). One other large yellow porcupine has also made an appearance, so skittish we think he might be Night Ranger, grown enormous over the summer. All in all, however, sightings have been slim this winter and we hope our friends are enjoying an easy winter.