

Merry Christmas 2013!



It was another year full of adventures for Tara and me. Miss T was dancing her heart out at the beginning of the year, gaining confidence en pointe, growing to love the other dancers in her school. They are a wonderful group of loving, hardworking athletes. Tara partnered with one of the girls to choreograph their own ballet for a showcase performance. The end of February, her troupe spent a weekend in Seattle to take a class and see a ballet.

Arno took me to see stand up amateur storytelling when *The Moth* came to Portland. Also in February I began some serious physical therapy to try and correct whatever is causing the persistent pain in my knee when I run. I was faithful at PT till

about June, and it only got a smidge better.

The end of February Grandma Trulove turned 93, and I was able to take her to an eye appointment when she couldn't get a shuttle from the senior home. It went so well that I became her regular eye appointment driver, so we've had the chance to do a little extra visiting this year! She is mostly blind in one eye, so it's important to take good care of the other one. Arno and I attended an irreverent talk in March by Sherman Alexie, one of my favourite authors. Alexie talked about

growing up on an Indian reservation and gave some great advice to teens in the audience who came with their schools, and Tara was lucky enough to be among them.

My past came back to haunt me when I discovered by coincidence that my ex-boyfriend Mark had gone into default on the house we own together, and had never told me. I pushed till he agreed to sell it. In March 2013 we got an unexpectedly great offer. Mark refused it. Turns out he had never actually intended to sell the house; he was only trying to buy time. His intent was to get as much free rent as he could.

Questioned about the oft-repeated promises to keep me in the loop or turn over the house, he told me he didn't believe he had ever said those things. I saw multiple attorneys and was counseled that it would be very expensive and mostly fruitless to pursue Mark. The smartest financial and spiritual move would be to suck it up. I wasn't sleeping, I was breaking out in hives, I was frazzled and spending a lot on their professional guidance. So eventually I managed to let it go. If the house goes into foreclosure, I will simply find a way to deal with it.



Tara went to her dad's place in McKinleyville, CA for Spring Break in March. Arno and I drove her down there, then stayed the night at Margaret's house so I had the chance to catch up with my friend about her always interesting life. The next day we continued our road trip, and explored Red Rock Canyon State Park, then camped beneath 100,000 year old tufa pinnacles in a prehistoric lake bed. I had never been to Death Valley National Park before, and found more beauty and grandeur than I had been expecting. The park was predictably hot—91 degrees the day we went to Badwater Basin—at 282 feet below sea level. We toured fascinating Scotty's Castle and learned about the brilliant crippled inventor who built the place, and Scotty, his unlikely friend and partner, who ran an ambitious fraudulent investment scheme. On our way home we stopped at Mono Lake, providing remarkable views of tall skinny tufa columns rising out of green algae beneath snow-capped mountains. We camped every night of the trip, in desert valleys and beneath towering trees in the snow with Pacific Loons calling eerily through the night.

In preparation for *Coppelia*, Tara spent up to 28 hours a week at class and practice, getting ready for the big performance (all while Tara had full school days and homework). In May we finally saw it: a hugely entertaining ballet comedy. All their hard work was evident, and it was great to have our girl on stage again. Later that month Tara and I camped in southern Washington, bonding in front of spectacular views of the Klickitat gorge. At 43 years old I finally heard my first elk bugle in the wild.

At the beginning of June, my brother Ian came to Portland for a weekend and we got to meet his girlfriend Karen. It was a bit of a work trip for them; Karen in training and Ian gearing up for a big move I was to find out about later: leaving his job in August to become self-employed! I'm so very proud of him for having the courage to go for it. Soon after, Tara wrapped up a successful 10th grade year, with impressive strides in study strategies and managing-teachers strategies. Tara made a difficult decision this summer to cut her time short with her dad, spending only two weeks. She wanted to attend a summer ballet intensive, and wanted to spend some time with friends. Dennis was supportive, and makes a great effort to get up to Portland to see her as often as he can.

I drug my pack out of the garage, cleaned off the spider webs, and did a hike to a mountain lake in June. My first solo backpacking trip in about 9 years, and I am so glad to bring it back into my life. Later in the month I met up with an old Humboldt County friend for the Pride Parade. The Uncles were driving a float as they do every year. Yet another reunion possible because of the Internet. I don't care what they say, I love you facebook, yes I do.

June sent me reeling when Pa got sick. He was in terrible shape for a week before anyone knew what was going on. That was the scariest part of all: not knowing. My fear of losing another parent kicked into high gear and I dreaded calling for information or getting information. Michelle and her kids were angels for me since I couldn't be there: caring for Pa and visiting him in the hospital and keeping his spirits up. LaDale and Lawton sent texts to keep Travis and me in the loop. He had to have an operation, but is much better now. By the time it was all over, my step-brother Lason got sick. Lason is young and healthy and it blew our minds when he, too ended up in the hospital for an operation. My heart just ached for Michelle, who was so strong through it all. Lason's positive attitude helped him bounce back, and he too is much better today.

All Spring we had been planning a trip to see Pa Bear and Michelle during the 4th of July. When we found out how serious Pa's health was just a week before the trip, and had to come up with Plan B. Pa suggested camping at Givens Hot Springs, just a couple miles down the road from their place. I was able to see my dad and Michelle, but did not have to impose upon them. They got to meet all the boys, and Tara got to hug her Grandma and Grandpa. I presented a gift I had purchased the previous summer: a researched history of the Trulove family name, which turns out to come from England (a fact Travis had already discovered in his genealogy research). The gift was completed with a real English sword, with an embroidered velvet crest and colours for Truloves to hang from the mounted sword.

The visit worked out just fine, and being with my dad helped both of us. Since we didn't want to tire them out with our gang of teenagers, we did a whole bunch of stuff we wouldn't have done otherwise: explored the fabulous Silver City almost-ghost town, visited the WWII Warhawk Air Museum in Nampa, and visited Rex Morehouse (Gramilda's partner) just before he moved back to Portland. On the way home we stumbled upon the John Day Fossil Beds. The museum is top-notch and the history here was completely unknown to me. Who knew that Oregon has one of the richest fossil beds on Earth? Or 33-million-year-old painted clay hills to explore? Our teens had been grumbly every single day since leaving home, but even they stopped their complaining temporarily, to investigate the museum and hike along desert trails.

Arno and I saw the Counting Crows and The Wallflowers at a winery venue out in the Columbia River Gorge. The middle of the month was Tara's 16th birthday. I had been working mandatory overtime at the Department of

Veterans Affairs since May, so I had earned enough to splurge on a Sweet 16 hot air balloon flight. It was exciting, peaceful, and oh, so beautiful to be up in the sky on a perfect Oregon morning. The following day we had a birthday party in the backyard with her friends.

Tara spent two weeks of July at a ballet intensive. Ballet all day long, every day for two weeks. It would have been three weeks except that during class she came down on her foot wrong and strained some ligaments. She could barely walk for days, and was in terrible pain for weeks. Her heart was broken to pieces when I wouldn't let her dance in the big event at the end of the ballet intensive. She took it easy on her foot the rest of the summer, and in late September when regular ballet classes started up again, she found she could still not dance. So it was Tara's turn with a physical therapist. His professional ballet background was perfect for my doubting girl, who learned a lot about healing for dancing. She is recovering, and is now back en pointe, after a lot of patience and hard work.

We bedecked ourselves in new wings for my favourite annual event: Faerieworlds! Tara and I missed 2012 because I was in Japan, so we were overdue to enter the faery realm. The fae folk have cast their spell wider, and now draw a regular pirate,



mermaid, and steampunk crowd in amongst the fauns, pixies, and elves. I caught a Marcus Eaton show in Portland in July, and then in August I did a little victory dance when my musician friend gathered enough donations to fund his next album. Now you will have to endure continued raving from me. ☺

Finally Arno and I got to backpack together. Summers are busy. Summers with kids are busier. And summers with kids for single parents working full time jobs are crazier still. It took us till August to find an available



weekend, but we filled our packs with freshly ground coffee, gourmet ingredients, a map, and high spirits, and took off into central Washington. I



didn't know anywhere else on the planet could impress me more than northern California, but we found that place. Goat Rocks Wilderness is *more* beautiful than the Trinity Alps Wilderness. We camped in a meadow of wildflowers, hiked on glaciers with friendly llamas, and shared stories with people hiking through on the Pacific Crest Trail. We found a lake still frozen (in August!), stayed miraculously dry in a jaw-dropping, crash-boom-banging thunderstorm and downpour, and Arno had the tenacity (cuz I was scared and being snippy) to support me as I climbed all the way up to the top of a real mountain peak!

The end of August I joined my red-headed friend Heather as she supported Portland's attempt to break a world record for the largest number of natural redheads gathered together. I haven't heard yet if Portland was officially recognized by Guinness. Tara's favourite Event Of The Year has superseded Faerieworlds because it's her world and not Mom's: **Kumoricon**. It's a three-day comic convention with emphasis on Japanese anime. This year a friend came to stay with Tara and I ferried them across the river each day to the convention center in Vancouver, Washington. The girls each had a new cosplay (costume) each day and also for the Saturday evening ball.

In September I had my very first photography lesson. I've been keeping a blog since 2007, and I've loved putting thought and care into the images I post. Prior to that, I have tried to capture special perspectives with my camera when I traveled. I want more than "This is me in front of a famous building. This is me in front of a famous waterfall." It was just one lesson, and I'm only beginning to try manual photography, but I do hope it helps to improve my ability in the long run. School started, and Miss T signed up for classes to include Advanced Graphic Arts, Pre-Calculus, AP Environmental Science, US History, and French. Her English teacher is already so impressed with her writing that he is trying to talk her into taking the AP test this year, even though she isn't in the AP English class.

As you are very much aware, the government shut down in October. The end result in practical, day to day terms, was nothing: our paychecks arrived in full, on time, without a glitch. At my VA office, most of us were "excepted" employees, which means it was in the national interest for us to continue working. We went dutifully to our jobs, knowing that we would not be paid till the children-who-pose-as-leaders in Washington got the country running again. It was very, very stressful. The fact that it worked out in the end is no excuse for the trauma some people suffered in the meantime. Tara and I were particularly fortunate, because I was able to cash out a certificate of deposit just at that moment, and pad the checking account. It helped me stay calm.

The workload at the Department of Veterans Affairs disability claims processing remains huge, and unlike previous years in which we only had to work mandatory overtime during the summer, this year we've had mandatory overtime since May and the scuttlebutt is that it will continue through at least March. It's causing burnout and poor attitudes.

But! I have interesting news: I have been approved to begin working at home four days a week. I don't know what to expect, though I am confident that without the non-stop interruptions I will be able to get more work done more efficiently and with fewer errors. This should help relieve the anxiety I feel every single day, when desperate to "make my points" or suffer punitive action. Send me all the good wishes you can, to make this transition go well for us. Tara is rather put out, since her solitary mornings and afternoons are gone. I am thrilled to gain two hours a day that I used to spend commuting. And I will no longer have to set my alarm for 4:30am!

Columbus Day weekend, Arno and I managed to get out for a second backpacking trip. I'm the one who chose the late date. I expected cold, expected rain and maybe even snow, but I did not expect that we would be camping on top of at least 18 inches of snow pack already. It was the first time I had ever camped on snow, and we had a really wonderful time. It prompted my dad to start telling Crater Lake snow camping stories, so that was an added bonus. The end of October, Sandi was able to come through and visit her brother, so we had a nice visit. Arno can't call The Uncles the "mythical" uncles anymore, because he finally got to meet Jim and Larry. We all said goodbye to their turkeys before their sudden seasonal end.

It has been a good year and I feel incredibly fortunate to have the love, and family, and friends that surround me. As my blog tagline says, "Careening through life and learning stuff." It is often true. Here we are, hurtling along, and learning so very much in the process, and always always getting better.

{I didn't have captions, so here are the photo descriptions, more or less from top to bottom: 1) Tara showing off her ballet form, 2) Me, standing on the top of Old Snowy at 7900' 3) Tara in glasses 4) Arno and I at the Maryhill winery concert venue 5) me with my camera 6) Tara and me on her birthday 7) & 8) Tara in two cosplays 9) Tara in Coppelia 10) Tara's artwork 11) our kitty, Racecar 12) Arno & I at the North Coast, and 13) Diego, Miguel, and Tara}