



October 7, 2007

Dear friends,

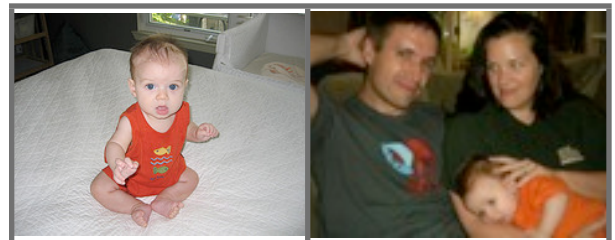
I'm sorry I've been so out of touch. It has been great and strange here and we've just jumped in both feet - but how did so much time go by and I haven't written anything much to anyone?



So I will try and catch you up a little chronologically.... Remember the kids and I left Uganda around 12 July and headed for New Zealand. We had a great visit with my old stepfather, Peter Woolf. We got accustomed to the cold sleeping with hot water bottles, and helped clean up after a hurricane chopping up felled trees and hauling mangled tin roofs off to the dump. Remind me to tell you about the day we sighted the Australian Crimson Rosella bird sometime...

Then the total miracle of meeting Caden, best grandson ever. He is truly a most beautiful and sweet-natured dream baby! And what a joy and delight to see Josh in his long-awaited role as Dad. Lauren is amazing too. She hadn't had much experience with babies but has taken to motherhood with the same energy, focus, instinct and brains she brings to all her undertakings. You can see all the baby photos at

http://www.flickr.com/photos/crowley_family/sets/ Yes he IS sitting up now at 5 months!



Then we flew to Portland and moved into the house on August 1. The furniture rental company came with dining, living and one bedroom - and kitchen wares. We borrowed the rest and hit Goodwill, Costco, and Home Depot pretty hard so everyone had beds and bedding and we

could cook and CLEAN - yow. Cait and her boyfriend (!?) Jay came down from Seattle, brother Eric came down from Olympia and sister Laurie and her friend Yeny and 7 year old daughter Graciela drove up from California for a week in those first weeks. It was fun exploring Portland and going to concerts and markets with them - and they helped get the house set up. (L-R below: Piers drew a nice pic of the house, Helene hangs droopy clothesline by the pool, we have some Moroccan rugs Paul had sent over last December.)

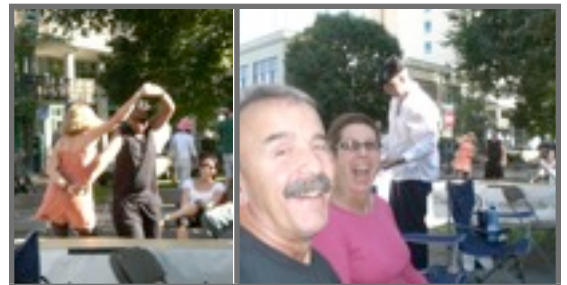


OK, then we went to the beach with Cait in September. An hour from our house! Very beautiful and fun but COLD! Piers came up from the beach a little before the girls and said "Mom, I didn't know my testicles could go back inside my body!?"



Then we went to SO many wonderful concerts and street fairs and festivals we were overwhelmed. Belize music at the zoo, Dr John the night tripper at Taste of Oregon festival, symphony on the waterfront with fireworks and cannons, Pickathon at the Pendarvis Farm, blues at the Rose Garden amphitheater, Grateful Dead cover band at the Crystal Ballroom, Monsters of Accordion with Jason Webley, Paul Taylor Dance Company at the Schnitzer Concert Hall, local Native American lore-based play at the Newmark Theater. WHOA. But let me tell you my favorite Portland anecdote so far...

A couple of weeks before Paul got here, our friend Carol got Caity and me tickets to the Femme Magnifique talent show and beauty contest. One of the Portland icons is a 76 year old drag queen named Darcelle, and every year Darcelle puts on this drag queen show at the Convention Center (HUGE). It was amazing! Really spectacular entertainment - non-stop talent acts (all lip-synching) by these beautiful guys dressed as women. Bette Midler impersonations, best animated villain contest, best Las Vegas showgirl contest, etc... THREE HOURS of this and we were drinking some kind of cocktails too. Then we realized we would have to RUN to catch the last train of the night which we did. Carol got off at the next stop and Cait and I looked around and noticed it was a VERY interesting trainload of



folks. We had an unusual number of drag queens, for example, and very flamboyantly



dressed gay guys. And then at the back of the train was a group of 15 year old hispanic “tough guys” doing free rapping - that is, taking turns making up spur of the moment rap poem/songs a la Eminem. Cait and I were looking pretty ordinary, but across from us there was an older couple heading home to the suburbs from the airport. They were looking quite puzzled and a little worried. At the next stop most of the drag queens got off, and the older lady leaned over to Cait and asked “What’s going on? What kind of event were all these people at?” Cait said “Well, we were at a drag beauty contest...” “Oh, OK thanks” she said, looking still puzzled. Cait and I were getting pretty giggly by now.

Then the rappers, who had not noticed the unusual ridership of the train, got a little rowdier and came down to the center of the train, near us, to show off their best pieces. So they are banging on the seats and floor and saying bmchchch UH UH ch ch and singing quite loudly, and Cait and I are laughing harder, and right at this point the lady leans over again and says to me “But... what’s a drag beauty contest?” Cait and I are getting near hysterical at this point, and the remaining gays and queens lean in to hear what I will tell her.. “Well... er, it was um, men dressing like women only in fabulous costumes and performing musical pieces...”. “Oh my” she says, while all the event attendees are grinning and rolling their eyes and I am saying things like, “It was great, really beautiful and fun. They were so talented and great, um...”. “Oh really? Oh my goodness” she says again and I look out the window for rescue as we pull in to the next stop.. No rescue there it seems. “Oh my god Caity,” I say, it’s the ZOOBOMBERS!”

Indeed, when the doors open about 40 zoobombers pile into our car. The zoobombers are another famous Portland group. The group consists of anyone with a bike who wants to meet at a certain bar on Sunday night, ride the MAX (train) UP to the zoo station and ride down the curvy twisty roads about 3 miles to the bottom at top speed. They are usually pretty motley and crazed. They ride tiny bikes and normal bikes and huge tall bikes and unicycles...

Cait and I are now in full blown hysteria. We can no longer see the couple across the aisle from us because there are so many nuts with big and little bikes and helmets and hats and stuffed animals between us. The guy standing right next to our seat is wearing, I swear, only a pair of black underwear and a helmet. His girlfriend is wearing a bra and wonder woman shorts with, I swear, a baby doll arm pinned to the front where her penis would be if she had one. Another bomber, who looks pretty normal, is crushed up against the rappers who continue to sing and thump, unperturbed. One of the remaining, rather flamboyant gay guys from the drag show is all excited about the underwear guy. “Oh MY GOD,” he says to him, “Are you

gay?” “NO!” Says the bomber. “Oh well,” says the gay guy, “can I take your picture?” “Well, I guess so.” So the guy pulls out his cell phone camera and proceeds to take photos of the underwear guy’s CROTCH. Then gay guy says “OH MY GOD, can I take a MOVIE?” “NO, no movies!” says underwear guy and turns away..

In the meantime the girl bomber next to the rappers is getting worried and is making worried faces to Cait across the train, and Cait is signing back that she shouldn’t worry they are harmless and sweet. But we are both so giggly a couple of the bombers get concerned and say “Don’t worry, we are getting off at the next stop...” Which throws us into more hilarity because, of course, the zoo stop is OUR stop too.

So we did get off with the zoobombers and we all walked happily up the hill together, but we wonder about the poor old couple and if they will ever take the max home from the airport again...

So this is the kind of adventures you can have if you come visit! We are still doing great without a car though think we are sometimes mistaken for bag people when we come home with our luggage cart hauling a lot of boxes and bags. Between that and the dang YARD WORK you’d think we would lose some weight... The kids are loving school and their bikes and we are all getting used to the chilliness up here on our mountain near the zoo.

Paul has only been home a couple of weeks but is already planning a trip back to Uganda on October 15th or so. It has been so fun with him - almost like playing house. He gets dressed up like a lumberjack and goes outside and prunes and cuts trees back and saws firewood. I’m sad he is going, but SOMEBODY has to make some money. He is loving it here, but is also very excited about his work which will take him traveling a lot. He is working primarily on his two great passions - savings led financial services and climate change - and has some jobs lined up doing it so that has been satisfying for him.

Me, I’m doing a little work here and there and have enrolled in an online “nurse-re-entry program”. I’m also doing some pro bono work with American College of Nurse Midwives reviewing the next edition of the *Life Saving Skills Manual*. That and getting the house fixed and energy efficient, cooking and cleaning and WALKING everywhere is keeping me pretty busy. You may know I also did the Race for the Cure for breast cancer last week and that had me thinking so much about my friend Barbara whom I stayed with some last year while she was being treated. You guys were so awesomely generous I was able to raise \$1,370 for the cure.

THANK YOU!

We are working on getting our website up and will let you know when we have solved our tech issues. rippey.org email SHOULD be working by now... We would so love to have you come visit. But in the meantime please stay in touch and we will do better, I promise!

Helene

