

Peaks and Valleys of 2014

Remember our ride over Niagara Falls over XMAS of last year? > Tumbling down the falls was a prelude to the adventures and emotional commotion that lay ahead in 2014.



We defrosted from icy Buffalo by celebrating New Years with Diana & Lowell in Borrego Springs. < Laughter for Nic & Barbie's birthday weekend soon followed. We would never miss a chance to enjoy each other's silliness. > You gotta love it!



February started with counting bald eagles for the USFS at Big Bear Lake. Mr. Baldy dived down and fetched a fish for his missus right in front of us. We looked at

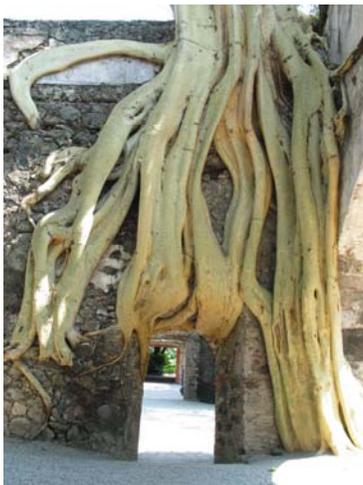


each other in disbelief of our luck. We later saw their nest and the young'ins popping their heads up. We learned what cootsicles are: coots stuck in the ice for eagles to pluck out for dinner. Then we zipped down the mountain to Morton Peak Fire Lookout, another tower we volunteer at for the USFS. Come visit!

Germa's high school bud, Andi flew into town, and we realized we had never shown him the desert. Thus, he got the grand tour! Camping in June Wash, taking a plunge in the Agua Caliente hot springs, biking Borrego Springs sculptures, hiking Calcite Mine >, climbing Salvation Mtn., camping at Salton Sea, and hiking Tahquitz Canyon close to Palm Springs.



Cuernavaca, a town one hour from Mexico City, was the highlight in March. Germa was helping the UN panel on Environmental Effects of



Ozone Depletion to draft a new quadrennial assessment report, and Annie was there to supervise. We thoroughly enjoyed the meeting's venue, the Hacienda de Cortes, originally built in 1531, later transformed into a sugar plantation, and then spa. It is a splendid display of how a magnificent piece of history can be held together by < fig tree roots. Annie explored Xochicalco, Museo Frida Kahlo, Cathedral de Cuernavaca, El Tepozteco, Tlayacapan with the WASPs (wives and sexual partners).



The scientists joined in for Taxco and Teotihuacan. > We enjoyed the ruins without any risk of being sacrificed by the Aztecs.

Back in Alpine, Annie's pal, Kelly visited. After being in San Diego for almost 28 years and Kelly growing up here, we finally did the 18 mile Five Peak hike in Mission Trails Park. Unsuspecting views of SD gave way to a super fun day. A bit of skiing, biking, and camping filled up the rest of the month.

April included our annual pick-up-wine bike ride to Santa Ynez. We also ventured to Playa La Castilla, a quaint seaside colony, one hour south of San Felipe, Baja California, to celebrate Easter with our Alpine neighbors, Bruce and Peggy. The > sunrise on the Sea of Cortez was splendid and Germar enjoyed racing pelicans on his windsurfer.



In between all the fun, Annie's dad fell and Annie's sister, Bernadette was diagnosed with cancer. Emotional somersaults commenced. Annie was ready to fly home but was advised to hold off.



With a U-turn contingency plan, Plan A was still on for May. We were off to Sweden for Germar to attend a meeting of Arctic scientists. Stockholm lived up to its reputation of being the prettiest capital in the world. ^ The conference was in Norrköping, and we figured that the healthiest way of getting there was by bicycle. Thus, we rented bikes and toodled along for two days through a pristine landscape of fjords, fields of yellow rapeseed, and burgundy houses via Nyköping where we had our very own burgundy cabin. Onward, we peddled to Norrköping, once an industrial city known for textiles. The Industrial Landscape in the center of town was a modernized picture of history. >



After two days of meetings we biked back to Stockholm via Närkevarn, Trosa, and the king's hunting palace. He was out hunting when we arrived. ♥ Bummer!



Back in Stockholm, we meandered thru the historic center, Gamla Stan; were awestruck by the Vasa, a gigantic 17th century war ship that sank on its maiden voyage; and visited the ABBA museum. Since we were already in Europe, we took the occasion to visit relatives of Germar close to Nürnberg (aka Nuremberg), whom he had not seen for 25 years. We enjoyed an awesome grille featuring Franconian specialties, although Annie was a bit disappointed not to find crickets on the BBQ. (The German word "grillen" for BBQ means both "to grill" and "crickets" and Annie was looking forward to a German tradition of BBQ'ed crickets).

From Franconia, we headed south to Garmisch via Neuschwanstein. ♥ Thank you Mad King Ludwig for sharing your towering turrets. We caught up with friends, hiked Wank with comfy beach chairs on top ♥) and realized the scenery would be different tomorrow in Alpine.



Germar went windsurfing & Annie mountain biked at Lake Isabella over Memorial Weekend. The wind was awesome, although the water level was only at 13%. The drought in California is serious! We need everyone to think snow! While we were playing, Bernadette wed Mary, prior to the start of chemo hell.

June found Annie enrolled in wine classes, in preparation of our fairytale later in the year. The summer solstice was celebrated appropriately in Valle de Guadalupe. We were served haute cuisine cooked outdoors under oaks surrounded by vineyards at Mogar Bodan. ♥ The next day we poured our friends, Danny & Barbara's wine at the annual "Guateque" wine festival. The valley is a place where you can't escape falling in love with Mexico.

And then Annie was off to Buffalo. Bernadette was enduring chemo and radiation misery, and dad needed exponential TLC. Annie denied that this was her last hug and kiss from her dear dad.





As always, the Sierras were calling for 4th of July. We backpacked up Piute Pass with pals, Michele, Raul & Steve. The weather was splendid, but the marmots were rascals chewing holes in backpacks, shirts & shoes! We bagged Mt. Emerson, < back dropped with Mt. Humphreys beckoning us for next time.

Kelly flew in for a conference and we put her on the roster for A-16's 3-peak challenge, which entailed hiking SoCal's 3 highest peaks in 3 days (a total gain of 12000 feet). It was more fun than we imagined. We zipped up San Jacinto; drove over to Mt. Baldy; watched the full moon rise as we hiked the ridge to the summit v; and hiked down to the "Notch" for

well-deserved libations. The next morning we drove over to San Gorgonio, and bagged it. We finished the three peaks in 34 hours. The goal for 2015 is to do it in 24 hours!

August started in a lightning storm at Tahquitz firetower. Two fires started on our shift, so the weekend was not boring, to say the least. The fires were dubbed "Rock 1" & "Rock 2". Watching the helicopters zoom by and fire crews working made us realize the importance of our 'jobs.'



Bernadette finally felt strong enough and able to visit dad. She did so, and then dad left us 6 AUG. He waited for her. Off to Buffalo again. It seems funerals and weddings are family reunions. All the Hoppes v embraced and our dad stories were slowly turning to treasures.



Germar took off to Zhengzhou in China to meet again with the UN panel and finalize the report that was started earlier this year in Mexico. That also meant one week not seeing the sky, thanks to horrendous air pollution. Germar was impressed how communism works: two-stroke scooters were outlawed two years ago and not a single one survived! All were replaced by masses of electric scooters running in stealth mode: no noise and no lights at night to conserve battery. Health breaks included excursions to the Longmen Grottoes, where 100,000 Buddhas are carved into the side of a mountain, and the "Shaolin Zen Music Ritual," V featuring the world's largest lighting system, perhaps a thousand actors, and more Buddhas, inspiring Germar to grow his very own Buddha Belly.

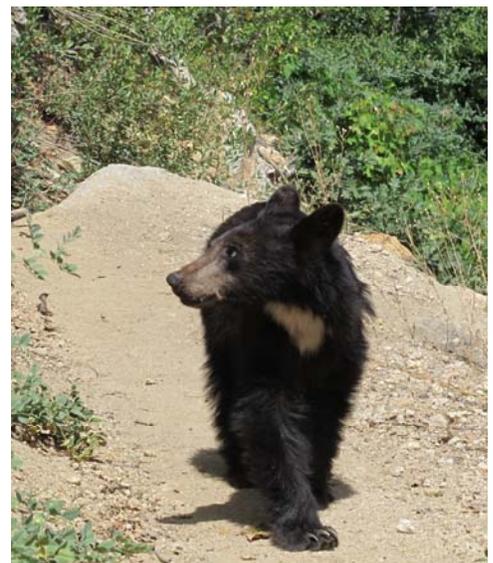


While Germar was in China, the Hoppe bunch went to Pine Bush (where Annie grew up) for another memorial. Dad, we love you!

The following weekend, Annie led a bike trip around Big Bear Lake for the San Diego Hiking Club. We had so much fun, V we bearily missed Germar, knowing he was still gathering inspiration for his Buddha belly.



Backpacking into Bearpaw Meadow on the High Sierra Trail ended our August and slipped us into September. We were hiking thru Giant Sequoias and were entranced with the granite grandeur high above the Middle Fork of the Kaweah



River towards the Great Western Divide. As we were spellbound, a baby bear practically walked right up to Annie. > Both were startled. Utto...where is mom?? Or...Dad, is that you?

11.5 miles later, we were at camp enjoying the alpine glow and envisioning tomorrow. Could it be possibly be more beautiful than today? "The" ✓ Ansel Adams Precipice Lake was a 'must see,' and of course, Gernar had to jump in, the hike was even more beautiful than yesterday. ✓



When Gernar was 10, he steamed down the Mosel river with his mom and dad in their rubber dinghy, powered by a temperamental Yugoslavia-made 4-hp engine. He still holds fond memories of the trip after all these years, which he just had to share with his honeybunch. Biking along vineyards? Annie was all in. Annie's friend, Jennifer always dreamed of Germany, so she packed her bags and joined us.



Our fairytale finally started! We picked up bikes in Koblenz and trained to Trier, ◀ the oldest town in Germany. We biked to Metz in France via Luxembourg. We fondled grapes along the bike trail and camped next to the river each night, safely guarded by castles on a hill. ✓ From Metz, we took a train to Saarbrücken and biked to Saarlouis via Völklingen



Ironworks (a UNESCO world heritage site featuring a gigantic ruin of a blast furnace). We continued to Merzig and Saarburg, via Schloss Saarstein, a VDP (Verband Deutscher Prädikats- und Qualitätsweingüter - the association of Germany's top wine producers) castle on a hill. We stopped at every chance for world class Rieslings, whether it was a medieval town, a Weingut's house, or another castle.

We continued along the meandering Saar until it confluenced with the Mosel. > Gernar's friend, Jürgen hooked up with us in Trittenheim. We sat on a park bench, overlooking the moonlit river, back dropped with vineyards, and savored the Rieslings. Onward we biked to Bernkastel-Kues in the heart of Germany's most renowned wine-making region. The twin towns were darling with their wood timbered houses. ♥



The days were filled with wine festivals, watching swans stealing grapes right from the vines, and more wine. The river peacefully meandered along and we followed. It was a

fairytale. After camping for a week, we enjoyed the luxury of an Art Nouveau hotel in Traben-Trarbach. Refreshed and spoiled, we biked on to Zell, home to the famous "Zeller Schwarze Katz," and ended the day in Cochem. The Reichsburg ♥ welcomed us in all its splendor. The view from it was impressive as the castle itself.



Our finale was one of the oldest castles (it was never destroyed) in all of Germany, Burg Eltz. ♥ It is owned & occupied by the same family since 33 generations.



Riding away, we gorged our last grapes and quickly gobbled them. We savored their lusciousness as we reminisced our fairy tale.

Next stop was to see Peter & Regine (our friends from hiking the Alps in 2011) & their boys in Haibach, close to Frankfurt, for brats and pumpkin. And then we went on to Andi & Lisa in Munich to prepare for Oktoberfest!

Finally, Germar got his love submerged in beer drinking heaven (one liter at a time) in true Bavarian style. >

A trip to Bavaria would not be complete without a visit to Germar's cousin, Fritz ♥ and his wife, Gabi,



who made for us the best Zwetschgendatschi on this planet (the English translation "plum cake" doesn't do justice). Fritz was showing off the latest addition to the family, Nina. <

We continued to Garmisch as Jennifer needed to see the Alps. To our surprise, we arrived just in time for the 75th anniversary of Burgrain, the suburb of Garmisch where

Germar grew up. As we were still in our dirndls and lederhosen, we headed straight to the beer tent where the festivities commenced. Germar was honored as the "Burgrainer" who travelled the farthest to celebrate. We enjoyed our friends and were soon on our way back to reality. (You may click [here](#) for the expanded version of our Mosel fairytale.)

Kaboom, October knocked on our door. Bernadette & Mary celebrated their union > and all the Hoppes flocked to Buffalo once again. It was a precious, well needed family affair. We know Dad would have loved it. And then Bernadette's PET scan was upon us. We all took a deep breath and...she had extremely optimistic results! Ya hoo!! Further diagnostic tests are still on the agenda per Boston, Mass. doctors. We just know 2015 will be less challenging than 2014!

Fritz & Gabi's son, Meinrad and his lovely Teresa joined us in Alpine at



the end of the month. They arrived in a red Mustang convertible & were enjoying CA in it's entirety. We showed them the desert, Germar put his Buddha belly to practice, and all were divinely inspired. <



72 months since our magic moment? Sure enough! We celebrated our sixth anniversary in Baja California. On the way south we stopped in Ensenada, treated ourselves to a spectacular sunset at the beach and met with



our geologist friends, John and Ana who prepared the best mole dinner on this planet. Our destination, the San Pedro Martir National Park, turned out to be a treasure. The average number of visitors per day is one - perfect for a romantic anniversary. We visited the observatory, Mexico's most important, and hiked up to Botella Azul, < with a stunning view of Picacho del Diablo, the Pacific Ocean, Sea of Cortez and mainland Mexico. We finished the days next to

a roaring campfire under the most sparkly Milky Way ever. On the way down the mountain, Annie spotted a huge bird in the sky. We stopped and it turned out to be a California Condor. More came, and at one time we saw 15 of them soaring in the sky. They were almost extinct 30 years ago, with only 22 remaining on this planet, all in captivity. Thanks to a well-designed breeding and releasing program, they now fly high above San Pedro Martir. Mind you, we had tears of awe. >

December started off with celebrating Germar's birthday at Cordiano's winery, with Betsy, John & Kim. We devoured the best pizza in San Diego County. Finally, about half a dozen Christmas parties got us in the mood for the holidays, even though, this time last year, dad was with us.



Snow is a 'must' for Christmas, thus we decided to enjoy the magnificent masterpiece of Mother Nature, Yosemite National Park. We skied Christmas day at Badger Pass, the West's first ski resort. We also snow-shoed to Ostrander hut, built in 1941 and 10 miles away from chaos. It was magical winter wonderland. As we backpacked out, down the ridge in pristine snow, > back dropped by Half Dome and its neighboring granite domes, we realized life does have many speed bumps, hopefully not granitic. However, it is still a beautiful thing, as is Yosemite, to be shared with you. Please send all your extra positive thoughts to dear Bernadette!!



We rounded off the holiday with a Christmas dinner at the Yosemite Lodge, a 73rd anniversary brunch at the Ahwahnee, and a stroll through the beautiful Yosemite Valley reflecting upon our year.

Thank you again for enduring our dazed looks as our minds have been on the right coast. We could not have made it through without you! We wish you all a splendid 2015, and look forward to spending many fun-filled & healthy times in the coming year.



Xoxoxoxoxo
Annie, Germar, Sierra &
Juniper